CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Born Again

GEORGE WALLACE WAS BESIDE HIMSELF.

"That little room where he said he spent all his time on his knees—that's where he made that little agreement with me that I wouldn't run delegates against his precinct delegates in Georgia, and he said he would support me provided I got three hundred or more delegates, and we shook hands." He was sitting with Elizabeth Drew, who did the best she could to capture his every Alabaman inflection for the *New Yorker's* readers. From a bed next to his wheelchair, Wallace was waving a pile of yellowed news clippings dating back to 1972, ones he had preserved all these years, with that same smoldering resentment and righteous contempt that when unleashed from behind a podium made him one of the most powerful orators in the history of American politics.

He read a quote from Carter, a month before the 1972 Democratic convention, saying he could support a Humphrey-Wallace ticket. "And now he says, 'I never supported Wallace and I never would.'"

He railed about how he got three hundred delegates, the number Carter set as a threshold for supporting him—then how Carter turned around and gave the nominating speech for Scoop Jackson instead. "Maybe someday he'd like to take a polygraph test on that."

She asked him if his losses were hard. "His voice was soft as he replied. 'Oh, no, honey,' he said. 'Nothing's that tough. After you've been shot five times and suffered the loss of walking, what's a loss?' He paused, and then he continued, '[N]ot being able to walk. But I'm living. I thought I was going to die as soon as I was hit. So losing a campaign—my goodness, that's not your life.'"

Though *Wallace* probably could not pass a polygraph test on that. Politics, power, was what he lived for. Reporters wondered whether his handlers, who loved him like a brother, didn't keep him campaigning in order to keep him alive. Wallace, after saying politics didn't matter when you've almost met your maker, kept railing about Carter. He imitated Carter: "I will never lie to you; I will never *misleeeeeeeed* you." He

complained, "He can go out and shake hands and get on television. I can't do that. He was my friend when I was popular. He said he was for me when he thought I'd die.... Those other fellows criticize me, but they didn't use me." He repeated himself: "He talks about spending all that time on his *kneeeeeees.* Well, I'm going to church tomorrow, but I don't go around talking about my religion."

She wrote, "Twice, he asked me to get him a glass of water. He apologized for asking for my help."

Drew got up to leave. He bleated out after her: "He *yuuuuused* me when I was popular. Look out for phonies, honey."

THE INTERVIEW HAD COME AFTER A CRUCIAL PRIMARY SHOWDOWN, IN Florida. The liberals, making the same calculation, stayed out, overestimating Wallace, underestimating Carter, glad to watch one of them knock the other out in that curiously half-Southern state, and hoping for both of them to rough up the third contestant in the race, Scoop Jackson, who was bidding for a strong show of support from the faction that made up a lion's share of the *other* half of Florida's unusual electorate—transplanted Jewish retirees.

But they were fighting another year's battles. They did not grasp that Wallace was now just a political vestige, and a pathetic one at that. Reporter Martin Schram looked in on a Wallace rally in a Vero Beach high school gym, all the old accoutrements still in place: Billy Grammer and his Grand Ole Opry Band to warm up the crowd; the red-white-and-blue bunting (Carter's campaign was done up all in green: fresh start, grass roots, the greening of America, *love*); the same focused rage, now aimed at his Georgia nemesis ("I'm tired of all this *high*-pocrisy.... I'm not the one who says, 'I'm a Southerner but I'm a *different kind* of Southerner.' What kind of Southerner does he *mean?* I think all Southerners are good"). The same raps on professors "totin' briefcases around and writin' things for one another," against "rip-off artists on welfare," and "[j]udges in the federal system" who "pay more attention to those who shoot you than those of you who got shot." He said the other candidates were ganging up on him—that is, ganging up on *you:* "They just don't like me stirring up the middle class so they can't control you."

But this year, the red meat earned him more pity than rebel yells. "Poor fella," a voter said when the candidate was wheeled behind the short, lead-reinforced lectern. "Look what it's like for him now."

When Wallace won the Florida primary in 1972, front-runner Edmund Muskie said it "reveal[ed] to a greater extent than I had imagined some of the worst instincts of which human beings are capable." Then the assassination attempt at the Laurel, Maryland, shopping center—the *crack, crack, crack, crack, crack* by a madman from Milwaukee imagining that a grand heroic act might finally win him the attention of pretty girls. Then the bedside vigils, tense moments near death, operation after operation (he still won primaries in Maryland and Michigan, both states in which white suburban voters were terrified that some federal judge might soon force their children to go to school with black kids); his pallid, ghostly appearance behind a specially designed podium at the Democratic convention in Miami Beach, a less frightening Wallace, a more domesticated Wallace—a Wallace, many of his listeners realized that day, whom maybe they could learn to live with.

More and more Northern Democrats began taking a new look at the former outcast, wondering whether the story he was telling might be adapted to their purpose as well—a rehabilitation that began in earnest with a joint appearance by Wallace and Ted Kennedy at a fairground in Decatur, Alabama, on July 4, 1973, for a "Spirit of America" rally, one DNC chairman Robert Strauss described as a "love fest." It was a story, people now began to reason, that was not really about race, or at least not only about race: his exhortations against "pointy-headed bureaucrats who couldn't park their bicycle straight" and "the pseudo-intellectual government, where a select, elite group have written guidelines in bureaus and court decisions, have spoken from some pulpits, some college campuses, some newspaper offices, looking down their noses at the average man on the street," just might speak best to the ruddy small-*d* democratic faith that honored the best in America.

Wallace himself began talking about the bad old days as if it had all been some massive misunderstanding: "I was for segregation because it was the law," he said in a 1974 interview. "Well, it's not the law anymore." That year his gubernatorial campaign courted black voters. ("Sure, I look like a white man. But my heart is as black as anyone's here," he said in an infamous stumble, which could hardly disturb any of his supporters: it only proved he wasn't a "pseudo-intellectual.") By the middle of 1975 there was talk that he might well capture the Democratic nomination. And that violence around the edges—his talk, in 1968, about how a protester who lay down in front of *his* limousine wouldn't live to see another day (that one always got thunderous applause); or, eight years later, the time a Peanut Brigadier at a hardware store in Okaloosa County in the Dixified Florida panhandle was told, "Young lady, you shouldn't be here. This is Wallace Country and you might be in danger"—well, maybe that could be ignored too. "Every one of them is talking about the things that I talked about in '72, aren't they?" George Wallace asked Elizabeth Drew. "I was talking about welfare; I was talking about foreign aid; I was talking about national defense; I was talking about tax reform," he explained. "I wanted to show that people of my region were in the mainstream of American political thought." More and more, it seemed he was right.

Memories, however, were long; when he spoke to the Arkansas legislature, for example (he said that "the people of Arkansas and Alabama speak the language the great majority wanted to hear politicians speak for so long"), the black members boycotted the chamber. Tom Wicker had compared the new rapprochement between Wallace and the liberals to the one that ended Reconstruction in 1876, when President Rutherford B. Hayes withdrew federal troops from the South and "the nation entered a 75-year period in which it tacitly permitted lily-white politics and social institutions in a quarter of the states." Long memories—indeed some going back to 1876 and before—were precisely what created the space that Jimmy Carter so ably filled: all the ruddy democratic faith and Southern gentility, with none of the snarling, slave plantation, fascist overtones. Like the time when a little lady from the Peanut Brigade showed up in the Okaloosa hardware store. Smiling, in a sweet soft Southern voice, she replied to the man warning about her safety because this was "Wallace country" that if he were a Wallace man in Carter country, he wouldn't be in danger at all.

The Alabaman grasped it best himself. "All of them done stole my water," he carped to a *Washington Post* reporter. "They're drinking out of my dipper." He'd already won. Which was why he would lose. Jimmy Carter certainly thought so. When *he* walked into a café and was told, "There ain't no need coming in here, this is Wallace Country," he replied with that famous wide grin: "OK, good deal, wouldn't want it to be unanimous."

FIRST, ON MARCH 6, CAME MASSACHUSETTS—WHERE ADS IN THE BOSTON papers featured photographs of Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson and the big, blunt pronouncement, "I AM AGAINST BUSING." Massachusetts was where Jackson chose to make his stand. Like Wallace, he thought Jimmy Carter was a meretricious phony. Like Wallace, he was determined to crush him.

Scoop Jackson was one of those politicians who seemed to have been around forever. A four-term senator from Washington State, and before that a seven-term representative, he'd been mentioned for the vice presidency in 1960; then Kennedy made him chairman of the Democratic National Committee. In 1970 he won reelection with 84 percent of the vote, more than any other Northern senator received—and, there being few senators who didn't look in the mirror and imagine a presidential prospect staring back at him, he naturally made a bid for the 1972 nomination, as the voice for those Democrats, as he put it, who didn't want “to make abortion, gay liberation, and the legalization of marijuana the primary issues of the country.” He failed badly, accomplishing little save spreading poison against the eventual nominee George McGovern. But he was back in the headlines in 1973, calling energy executives before his Senate committee, browbeating them as profiteers, calling for the nationalization of their companies, accusing Nixon of caring more about their profits than the price of gasoline at the pump. It was the sort of muscular old economic populism that Gary Hart was talking about when he derided those who “clung to the Roosevelt model long after it had ceased to relate to reality.”

Yes, Scoop Jackson was boring: a “black hole of charisma,” one political journalist called him, and during one dreary summer in Washington the humorist Mark Russell joked it was “so boring that the kids sit around in circles and get high on Scoop Jackson speeches.”

Since then, though, he'd had speech coaching, he'd had surgery to perk up his drooping eyelids, he cut out starches, he grew out his hair a little bit. His handlers tried to recruit Warren Beatty to support the campaign. His economic populism was, well, popular. And in a Democratic Party whose younger lights were racing to the left on lifestyle issues, a square like him filled a rather large niche. Besides, asked Richard Reeves at the end of 1973 in a *New York* magazine cover story called “The Dawn of an Old Era: The Inevitability of Scoop Jackson,” if not Scoop in 1976, who else?

It didn't look so inevitable now. But maybe if he could make something happen in Massachusetts, he could become the default for the increasing number of Democrats who thought that weird Carter guy was a creep.

One of his old-fashioned notions was that, “détente” notwithstanding, the Soviet Union was as dangerously threatening as ever. (One of Daniel Schorr's biggest scoops from the Pike Report was the revelation that Jackson secretly helped the CIA evade the investigation.) But that didn't play in the one state that George McGovern won. That left busing—and in Boston, buses were still rolling under police escort. Boston's Hyde Park High closed because of racial violence in January; a hundred kids threw bottles and rocks and set fires and smashed police-cruiser windshields near the Bunker Hill Monument in February. Scoop Jackson loudly insisted that neither his proposed constitutional amendment to stop busing, nor antibusing protest itself, had anything to do with racial animus. “I think the people of this state aren't racist,” he said at his opening campaign event in Beantown. “They're good, decent Americans. The people of Massachusetts resent that if you're opposed to forced busing, you're labeled a racist.” He also insisted he wasn't campaigning to take votes away from George Wallace—who was not bothering to be polite about it. The Alabaman just traipsed through South Boston in 1976, announcing, “They said busing, and I said no.” A columnist who watched him say it at Lithuanian Hall reported what happened next: “Cries of ‘up, up’ erupted. . . . They leaped to their feet, shaking their fists, some of them. George Wallace leaned back and drank in the pandemonium. He could have taken them anywhere he wanted.”

Jackson gained an inside track in Massachusetts by striking hard and smart against Jimmy Carter's arrogance, which had grown overwhelming. At Faneuil Hall, during a week when his face was on the cover of *Time* and *Newsweek*, Carter promised that all the criticism being aimed at him by the other candidates wouldn't hurt him. “But I'm afraid it might hurt this country.” Carter's team had decided to throw all they had into Massachusetts, extending their ad buys on Boston TV stations from the New Hampshire campaign through the Massachusetts voting a week later. A twenty-nine-year-old on the Carter team named Greg Schneiders wrote a memo warning that if the campaign peaked that early it would only give any “stop Carter” movement among an angry Washington, D.C., establishment more time to gel. He proved to be a lone voice. Everyone else was convinced that three wins in a row, in the farm belt, a New England state, and then one of the biggest industrial states in the country—and then, the next week, in the Southern state of Florida—would all put the finishing touches on the race.

And at that, a disciplined candidate grew sloppy.

The day before the New Hampshire primary, he was asked at a televised League of Women Voters forum for details about how he would change the tax code, which he liked to call a “disgrace.” For instance, would he end the home mortgage interest deduction? Yes, Carter answered, that “would be among those I would like to do away with.”

The other candidates attacked—none more aggressively than Jackson. He put up TV commercials saying this inexperienced outsider who understood nothing about the federal government had proposed an idea that meant “American homeowners will have to pay $6 billion more in taxes.” He told reporters, “He'd better do some homework before he comes up with fuzzy ideas.”

The old politics had struck back. Jackson upset the Massachusetts field with 23 percent of the vote. The liberal Udall came in second with 18, and Wallace came in third with 17 (though he scored 68 and 61 percent respectively in South Boston's two wards). Jimmy Carter, with 14 percent, finished fourth; none of the other liberals—Harris, Shriver, Shapp, and Bayh (who announced he was suspending his campaign)—got more than 10 percent. Commentators started talking about a "Jackson juggernaut"—and wondered whether last year's invincible newcomer wasn't just a flash in the pan and all those acres of newsprint spent anatomizing and extolling "antipolitics" and the "revolt against Washington" weren't so much useless bird-cage liner now that the longest-serving legislator in the race, the unashamed champion of big-government federal programs, the Cold Warrior, had prevailed. Maybe, just maybe, nothing in the Democratic Party had truly changed. Certainly the victor thought so: "We put together the grand old coalition that elected Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson"—ignoring the fact of the plain anti–civil rights undertone of his appeal.

JIMMY CARTER DIDN'T IGNORE IT. HE LET HIS BITTERNESS SHOW: "IF I have to win by appealing to an emotional, negative issue, that has connotations of racism, I don't want to win that kind of race." Reporters asked him if he was calling Scoop Jackson a racist, and he flipped out: *"I didn't say Senator Jackson was a racist."* Thereafter, though, he upped the ante, saying in Florida the week before the balloting, "To build a campaign in a state like Massachusetts on an issue that's already divided the people, already created disharmony, sometimes even bloodshed, which is obviously a very emotional issue which has racial connotations, this is a wrong thing." His campaign, in fact, had been startled to learn that in the black Boston neighborhood of Roxbury, he had come in first. They actually couldn't quite believe their good fortune. A smart campaigner, he adapted, pressing an unexpected advantage: ducking into Illinois, which voted on March 16, and which he was now building up as "my most important state in the nation," and speaking at the Monument of Faith Evangelistic Church in a converted synagogue on Chicago's black South Side:

"We worked in the same fields, we fished in the same creek bed, went swimming in the same swimming hole, played with the same steel rails, homemade toys. We got on the train, me and my black playmates, we didn't sit together. My black playmates—I couldn't understand why—went to the back."

Taking on the slow, rhythmic cadences of a preacher, he spoke of unveiling Martin Luther King's portrait in the state capitol in 1974 alongside his widow, Coretta Scott King, and his father Martin Luther "Daddy" King, "and we sang together 'We Shall Overcome.'" He said, "You don't see any rich people in prison," and spoke of Jack Kennedy, who offered solidarity to Coretta when her husband was in an Atlanta jail: "We all feel like we're outsiders." His listeners' attentions was riveted. Then in Rockford he told a press conference that he thought détente was splendid—but "I would be very much tougher in the future in our negotiations with the Soviet Union." At a UAW hall, he spoke of "my intimate relationship with the working people of this country" and said "I know what it means to work for a living." In a president "I think we need somebody who understands what it means to work." Those were the populist Fred Harris's lines—although Harris would soon no longer deliver them: within three weeks, Harris's campaign's telephones were cut off. Maybe being all things to all people could *work.*

In Florida Carter bid for a key part of Jackson's constituency. He put on a yarmulke and spoke at synagogues and at Jewish centers in Miami, trumpeting a colloquy he'd enjoyed in Israel with Golda Meir. It wasn't quite as effective. He looked, Martin Schram wrote, like "Jimmy, chief of the Mouseketeers," and sounded like "grits at a seder." He did better recruiting many of the leaders of the country's most liberal unions—the UAW, the Machinists, the Communications Workers—playing to their eagerness to head off Wallace's dark appeal to their members. Co-opting Wallace's old slogan, Carter said to working-class audiences, "Let's not send them a message. Let's send them a president."

Jackson set up squads to prowl the condominiums that house Jewish retirees, and campaigned with Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the near neoconservative who'd resigned from his position at the United Nations ("a sad day for America," Jackson's statement had noted), eager to help save the Democratic Party from itself: "Look at what American liberalism has done!" Moynihan cried to a friend. "It's pushed Boston so far that it's voting for George Wallace! John Kennedy's city!" Mo Udall trumpeted his second-place Massachusetts finish, saying that it anointed him as the leading "progressive"—"progressive centrist," actually. Reporters asked if that was different from being a "liberal." He said it most certainly was—but how, exactly, he was not able to explain. Then he admitted it was mostly an exercise in public relations—"People relate better to 'progressive.' 'Liberal' is equated in some places with too much spending, softness on welfare and on crime, and some of the social issues such as abortion and amnesty"—which didn't help; two weeks later, he was still being asked to explain. "I haven't changed a single program," he complained in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. "Progressive is an honorable label and I've been using it lately." He was now the field's front-runner in semantics. "My campaign began to lose momentum," he wrote in *Too Funny to Be President*, "and soon we were bogged down like a dinosaur in a tar pit."

The talk around Washington was that Frank Church would soon enter, and maybe California governor Jerry Brown, too. They had read the tea leaves in the latest polls, which now suggested that on March 9 in Florida, the old politics—George Wallace's politics, Scoop Jackson's politics—would in fact get crushed.

Primary night in Florida. Some two dozen Carter relatives gathered at a hotel in Atlanta, cameras everywhere. Peanut Brigadiers who'd fanned out for a "Battle of Jacksonville," where they made 70,000 voter contacts and passed out 100,000 pieces of literature in a city with a large proportion of the voters undecided between Wallace and Carter, chewed fingernails. No one, actually, could quite predict anything in a state where some 200,000 new voters had moved in since 1972. The candidate certainly still seemed testy: "Do you want to stop talking so I can give you my answer or do you want to go ahead and ask a second question as well?" he snapped at one reporter. "I'll be glad to repeat myself again—or else you can play your tape back to yourself," he yowled at another.

He needn't worry: Carter, 35 percent. Wallace, 32 percent. Jackson, 22 percent.

Jimmy Carter had been born again. He was the front-runner once more.

ON THE REPUBLICAN SIDE, A NEW DEVELOPMENT. RONALD REAGAN HAD been reticent about taking the fight to Gerald Ford on foreign policy; his campaign manager, John Sears, had been whispering in his ear that too much criticism of détente could only offend the Republican establishment and cripple him in the general election. His standard speech of thirty-five minutes had thirty seconds on the subject, calling détente a "one-way street," or saying the only thing it availed America was "the right to sell Pepsi-Cola in Siberia." It always won a thunderclap of applause. His opening speech had but a line on the subject. ("A decade ago we had military superiority. Today we are in danger of being surpassed by a nation that has never made any effort to hide its hostility to everything we stand for.") He even, the night before the New Hampshire primary, wondered in a befuddled tone whether Congress hadn't done the right thing by banning aid for Angola, for all he knew, given the "mystery" surrounding the issue. Perhaps it was a patriotic thing. How did it

serve the battle for civilization against the forces of evil to too harshly second-guess a commander in chief?

Now, not *Nancy* Reagan. David Keene once explained to the couple his plan to compromise to win some delegates at a state convention. He apologized for his lack of political aggressiveness: "We have to do it, though personally, I'd rather sail in and kick the shit out of 'em." Nancy promptly reared up with gleaming eyes: "Now *that* is the kind of talk I like to hear."

Her husband meanwhile had said at a Concord, New Hampshire, press conference, after losing that primary, that he "couldn't be more pleased" with the state results—why, if you counted the Democratic write-in votes (which didn't count), it had been a virtual tie! And he pointed reporters to a hand-lettered sign on his chartered 727, which read "Air Force One—'77." Everything always worked out in the end, gloriously

His handlers, less optimistic, were dumbfounded by what had happened on election night in New Hampshire. Their whole strategy had been built on a quick win there, a quick win in Florida, a quick win in Illinois—and a quick concession from unelected, unloved President Ford. John Sears had a mantra: "Politics is motion." Now they had none. In a predawn, booze-soaked meeting after New Hampshire's election night, they contemplated their internal poll, which Meldrim Thomson had oafishly leaked to the media, showing Reagan going into the voting 8 points ahead—and a poll, which they prayed no one saw, showing that their previous lead in Florida had been wiped away. They prevailed upon their candidate: it was time to take the knife to their opponent at his most vulnerable point, and at Reagan's strongest point. That was foreign policy. That was the dreaded doctrine of "détente."

They had a poll from January showing that 44 percent of *all* Americans preferred Reagan's hard line on the Soviets, compared with 25 percent who liked Ford's. (A majority agreed that Reagan "would be unafraid to stand up to the Russians, and that is right.") They reminded him how cutting the president and the surrogates had been in the homestretch. They implored him: just make it about the State Department; you don't have to mention Jerry Ford by name. Maybe they reminded him of a line he liked to drop in on the apparently obscure subject of the Panama Canal Zone.

Negotiations to reform the 1904 treaty that turned the ten-mile-wide strip surrounding the canal into a nearly sovereign entity of the United States in perpetuity had been ongoing since the administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower. The treaty was an ugly thing, a relic of a more imperialist, less suspicious, age: it was a gift to the United States from the rebels who established the Republic of Panama by breaking away from the nation of Colombia with the aid of the gunboat USS *Nashville* and a convenient shutdown of the U.S.-owned Panamanian Railway, which kept Colombia's army from Panama City. Then came the heroic work of building a modern eleventh wonder of the world—a tale, stripped of the military bullying and backhanded chicanery, told to generations of rapt American schoolboys in textbooks that proclaimed, for example, "American pluck and luck conquered all. . . . The grand dream was realized. In 1913 the waters of the Atlantic and the Pacific were united."

But to the poor put-upon Panamanians, the "Zone"—"as much a part of the United States as is Omaha, Nebraska," the travel writer John Gunther observed—was a nightmare of colonialist humiliation. So they fought back: in 1913, when Panamanian police shot three unarmed U.S. marines; in 1947, after America sought to make permanent its supposedly temporary wartime military bases in defiance of the unanimous vote of the National Assembly; in 1958, when students defiantly planted their nation's flag at fifty points inside the Zone, and 1959, when they burned Americans' cars; and then, finally, in the 1964 riots that left four Americans and twenty-four Panamanians dead. By the end of 1964 Lyndon Johnson announced plans for an "entirely new treaty" that would "recognize the sovereignty of Panama" over the Zone. And by the presidency of Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger was warning, "It will turn into a Vietnam-type situation" unless the Panamanians get some concessions. In February 1974, the State Department announced new negotiating principles "that will guarantee continued effective operation of the Canal while meeting Panama's legitimate aspirations," including greater input from Panama into the canal's administration, a greater share of the canal's profits—and, most significant, an eventual, if theoretical, end to America's control of the canal "in perpetuity."

And at that, conservatives went berserk.

Strom Thurmond of South Carolina introduced a resolution for "continued undiluted United States sovereignty over the United States-owned Canal Zone on the Isthmus of Panama." It included an imperishable comment: "We own it. We bought it. It's ours." Ronald Reagan, for one, was sold. In a May 1975 radio broadcast he quoted Senator Jesse Helms, who said, "I have received reliable information, that Dr. Kissinger has approved plans to turn over effective control of police and fire protection and postal services in the Canal Zone of the Republic of Panama." Reagan then argued that this meant America would soon be helpless to fight back against the next civil disturbance, and that Americans would have their mail opened by the fearsome head of the state security service, "Lieutenant Colonel"—he paused, struggling to pronounce the unfamiliar name—"Manuel Noriega, a man not unfriendly to the Cuban Communists." He concluded in tones of the John Birch Society—which soon began distributing bumper strikers reading DON'T GIVE PANAMA OUR CANAL: GIVE THEM KISSINGER INSTEAD!—"One can and is forced to ask: Why?"

On Memorial Day he tied "our seeming willingness to give away the Panama Canal" to the same liberal fecklessness that produced Truman's stalemate in Korea, Kennedy's betrayal at the Bay of Pigs, and now our humiliating retreat in Vietnam. He asked, "Have we stopped to think that young Americans have seldom if ever in their lives seen America act as a great nation?" (Apparently the civil rights movement didn't count.) He told the Veterans of Foreign Wars at their annual convention in August that "that nation exists only because of us"; that the current government of Omar Torrijos was "Marxist" (he was actually an anti-Communist authoritarian, one of the reasons American presidents had trusted him in negotiations); and that under our benign protection "Panama has the highest standard of living in Central America." That fall, George Wallace joined in, angrily confronting Kissinger at a governors' conference. A conservative issue was born. In a speech in Bicentennial-happy Philadelphia a month before his official entry into the presidential campaign, Reagan tried on Helms's line: "I think we'd be damn fools to turn over the Panama Canal. We built it. We paid for it. It's ours." It fit like a glove: the *Philadelphia Inquirer* said he then received "thunderous applause."

Ford and Kissinger had desperately hoped to keep the issue out of the presidential campaign. Barry Goldwater, who had come out for calling out the Marines during the 1964 crisis over flying the U.S. flag, now said a new treaty was desperately needed because the canal was all but indefensible against guerrilla sabotage—and accused Reagan of "gross factual errors" and "a surprisingly dangerous state of mind." Reagan ignored his old friend.

He'd given a hard-hitting foreign policy speech in New Hampshire on February 10, but the audience was a bunch of prep school boys at Phillips Exeter Academy, and the address had fallen flat. This time, the new rhetorical strategy was tried at a stadium: on February 27 at a spring-training ball field in Winter Park, Florida, idled by a major-league labor dispute. The climax went:

"State Department actions for several years now have suggested that they are intimidated by the propaganda of Panama's military dictator, Fidel Castro's good friend, Gen. Omar Torrijos. Our State Department apparently believes the hints regularly dispensed by the leftist Torrijos regime that the canal will be sabotaged if we don't hand it over. Our government has maintained a mouse-like silence as criticisms of the giveaway have increased.... I don't understand how the State Department can suggest we pay blackmail to this dictator, for blackmail is what it is. When it comes to the Canal, we bought it, we paid for it, it's ours, and we should tell Torrijos and company that we are going to keep it."

The crowd went wild.

David Keene, in charge of organizing Florida for Reagan, was surprised: People weren't reading about Panama in the newspapers. So why were they reacting like this? Ronald Reagan understood. "The issue I sense," he told Kevin Phillips, "is, 'The empire is in decline.'... The Establishment doesn't want to raise it." His listeners remembered those shameful images of the evacuation of Saigon, that line of bodies snaking up the ladder to that shack atop the CIA station chief's home. God's chosen nation, with its tail between its legs. They remembered those Panamanian riots from 1964, and now Panama was being rewarded for rioting—just like those ungrateful Negroes in those Northern cities they had left behind to retire in Florida: they had rioted, and then got more civil rights bills and social programs. ("Rioting for rent supplements," a congressman had called it back in the 1960s.) And now Jerry Ford was ready to let it happen again. Damn right they cheered. We bought it. We paid for it. It's ours.

Evans and Novak had described his previous rhetoric in Florida as "wrapped in cotton wadding with scarcely a glint of a sharp edge." Now he wielded a dagger. To a woman who asked, "Will you help New York please?" he answered, "Well, I won't saw it off." And at a March 4 press conference in Orlando he said, "All I can see is what other nations the world over see: the collapse of the American will and the retreat of American power. There is little doubt in my mind that the Soviet Union will not stop taking advantage of détente until it sees that the American people have elected a new President and appointed a new Secretary of State." That made news—news that a Republican presidential administration might *not* star Henry Kissinger any longer. He said, "Last year and this, the Soviet Union, using Castro's mercenaries, intervened decisively in the Angolan civil war and routed pro-Western forces. Yet Ford and Kissinger continue to tell us that we must not let that interfere with détente." He continued, "Despite Mr. Ford's evident"—ouch!—"decency, honor, and patriotism, he has shown neither the vision nor leadership necessary to halt and reverse the diplomatic and military decline of the United States." So it was high time for Ford to announce, "We are getting out of détente.... I believe in the peace of which Mr. Ford speaks—as much as any man. But in places such as Angola, Cambodia, and Vietnam, the peace they have come to know is the peace of the grave."

That same morning left-leaning Mozambique closed its border with Rhodesia, a white-ruled anti-Communist power, and Kissinger testified before the House International Relations Committee, warning, if that was the word, that Cuba should act "with great circumspection" in southern Africa. Compared to that, Reagan's dagger thrust that "under Kissinger and Ford this nation has become number two in military power in a world where it is dangerous—if not fatal—to be second best" sounded swell to Florida's retirees.

IT WAS NOT ENOUGH IN FLORIDA TO WIN. IN FACT, REAGAN LOST BY A wider margin there than in New Hampshire. He also lost that week in Vermont (Ford 84 percent, Reagan 15), and Massachusetts (Ford 61, Reagan 34, with twenty-seven delegates for Ford and fifteen for Reagan; a *Boston Globe* exit poll found he'd done well only among "conservative" and "very conservative" voters), two states where he hadn't campaigned. Florida, in fact, was his fifth loss in a row—though he still managed to respond, the next day, "I cannot tell you how delighted I am. The incumbent in these first couple of primaries has thrown the whole load at us; he has shot all the big artillery there is, used everything in the incumbency he can, and we are still possessing almost half the Republican vote."

The Florida loss had been in the cards. His campaign chairman was an overweight, oafish car dealer who told reporters things like "If I was going to give the world an enema, I'd insert the nozzle in Washington." Stuart Spencer, who'd helped run Reagan's 1966 campaign but was now working for Ford's, was not surprised by his former client's string of losses: "He's lazy, that's all," Spencer told Vic Gold. "I think his energy level is going to be a problem. Low blood sugar. I think that's why he likes those jelly beans.... Sure, aides can brief him. But if a guy's deep, he's deep. If he's shallow, he's shallow."

The president's campaign machine, on the other hand, was finally humming. Dick Cheney, his tough chief of staff, was riding herd—hiring twenty-four new staffers in ten days and opening a phone office that reached four hundred thousand voters. The candidate toughened up his Cold War rhetoric, blunting Reagan's: he said he would have nothing to do with “international outlaw” Fidel Castro—this scuttled plans to begin normalizing relations with Cuba—and claimed “détente was only a word that was coined” and he would no longer use it. His actual policy, he said, was “peace through strength.”

He made the remarks on Castro while swearing in 1,161 new citizens from Cuba. Noted a reporter, “Ronald Reagan brings a political campaign to town. Gerald Ford brings the White House.” And so Ford dangled a Treasury Department job before the former president of the Florida Conservative Union. He also announced so much pork for Florida, Reagan told his audiences, that “when he [Ford] arrived in their town ‘the band won't know whether to play ‘Hail to the Chief’ or ‘Santa Claus Is Coming to Town.’” A free tape of Betty Ford urging everyone to vote was sent to every radio station in Florida. The first lady's press secretary denied this was dirty pool; it was only, she said, a “public service announcement.”

Reagan went on *Meet the Press* and downplayed expectations for the next primary, in Illinois, saying he'd be happy with only 40 percent—in the state where he'd been born and spent his youth, and which John Sears's original campaign plan had pegged as Ford's Waterloo. Fighting a cold, and, reportedly, depression, he leveled the nasty swipe that the Chinese invited Nixon back to China because they did not have faith in Gerald Ford, and that having Ford on the ballot in November would mean “having to defend a part of the past which Republicans would like to be left to history.” He backtracked in the face of a flurry of questions from reporters who wanted to know if that meant he held Ford responsible for Watergate.

The genial optimist was uncharacteristically desperate. His campaign had a $688,000 deficit; Ford's had a $1.15 million surplus. Citizens for Reagan filed a complaint with the FEC, maintaining that since Kissinger was “using his high office for the express purposes of a campaign platform to promote the Ford candidacy,” his trips should be charged as a campaign expenditure. Reagan's aide Don Totten, in remarks the *New York Times* reported had been approved in advance by the campaign press secretary, said Ford's strategy was “actual buying of the votes by outright bribery.” Reagan, asked if he agreed, said only that he would not have used the same words—and also said on the campaign trail that Ford's deputies were “lying through their teeth” when they said Reagan had expected victory in New Hampshire (they weren't).

It got the president's back up—he was suddenly filled with a gust of fighting spirit. The *Times* quoted an aide who spoke for the mood of the campaign concerning Reagan: that it was time to “crush him”—once and for all.

And, in Illinois on March 16, crush him Ford did, with 58.9 percent of the vote. Reagan responded in a statement from California, “We appear to have met our goal with something over 40 percent of the vote. I have never been under any illusion that our grassroots campaign could successfully buck both the Illinois Republican organization and the promises being issued so bountifully by the White House. . . . I look forward to the North Carolina primary next week.”

That was his rebuff to fellow Republicans who were telling him that it was now time for him to quit.

THE DAY BEFORE THE ILLINOIS BALLOTING, AND EIGHT DAYS BEFORE North Carolina's, the Reagan campaign 727, scheduled for Raleigh, North Carolina, sat idling for hours on the tarmac in Los Angeles. The staffers were waiting while volunteers in Washington emptied envelopes and counted checks to see if they had enough to pay for the flight. They made plans to start taking commercial flights. The day before Illinois, Frank Reynolds of ABC said, “The odds against him are very long now and because he is not a dreamer, Ronald Reagan must know he is on the edge of defeat.” The *Times* quoted Ford supporters like Senator Charles Percy patting his opponent condescendingly on the head: “Ronald Reagan has sharpened up the Ford organization. His campaign has helped us. It would have been a very poor organization . . . without the Reagan challenge.” The *New Yorker*'s Elizabeth Drew wrote, “the problem with suggestions that Reagan quit is that they overlook the fact that to quit would leave him without a role.” As the *New York Times* reported, “The Californian argued that he still had a 50–50 chance of nomination—an assessment even his staff made no attempt to defend.”

It was around then that the candidate walked in on a meeting between his wife and Lyn Nofziger. She thought her husband was beginning to look “foolish.” She was in the middle of pleading with his old confidant to talk him into dropping out.

Reagan had had quite enough of talk like that. On the nineteenth, reporters waved a press release from the National Conference of Republican Mayors announcing their telegram to him begging him to step aside, which brought on a rare break in the old trouper's composure: “For heaven's sake, fellas, let's not be naive. That pressure to quit the race is being engineered from the same place that engineered pressure for me not to run in the first place—The White House! I'm not getting out! I'm not going to pay any attention to them now when they suggest that I should quit. Why doesn't *he* quit?"

Someone then asked him again: why don't you quit? There followed several seconds of awkward silence, before Ronald Reagan walked away.

Besides, he knew something that Chuck Percy, ABC News, the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, and even the President of the United States did not know: a new conservative-movement political machine was humming just beneath the Establishment's radar in North Carolina, ready to rewire what people thought they knew about how American politics worked.

THE CULTURAL CONDITIONS FOR A CONSERVATIVE ELECTORAL UPSURGE that March were propitious. The POWs were back in the news: on the fourth, Admiral James Stockdale became the seventh captive awarded the Medal of Honor (those seven were nearly 3 percent of the war's total recipients)—and the first in the history of the award to win it for a suicide attempt. The citation read, "He deliberately inflicted a near-mortal wound to his person in order to convince his captors of his willingness to give up his life rather than capitulate." That instantiated the Reaganite narrative that these stout-hearted men all but single-handedly proved the nobility of America's resistance to Communism in Vietnam—that "we walked out of Hanoi as winners." (Perhaps sensitive to the political implications, President Ford folded a campaign slogan into his East Room presentation of the medal to Stockdale and three other Vietnam vets: "As we celebrate our Bicentennial Year, we take satisfaction in our power to preserve peace through strength.")

Bicentennial observations were becoming ubiquitous that unexpectedly balmy spring: the Freedom Train, rolling through burg after burg with its display cases of American Revolutionary artifacts and technological marvels, and also a "Freedom Wagon Train" that covered twenty miles a day and stopped each night in a different "Bicentennial town" for a performance by the Penn State University Show Troupe. There were Bicentennial quarters, Bicentennial flags—and, each night on CBS, a "Bicentennial minute," in which a different celebrity backed by sonorous brass and snapping snares, narrated the heroic self-sacrifices of America's original patriots, ending with a version of Walter Cronkite's famous sign-off, "And that's the way it was," adding, "two hundred years ago today."

Patriotism: a splendid spur to nostalgic right-wing reveries—as was, that March, the continuing wave of terrorism that accompanied Patty Hearst's trial. Two days after the Florida primary, part of a defective bomb exploded at a Hearst family retreat near Redding, California; the New World Liberation Front claimed responsibility. Three days later the *Chicago Tribune* published the first in a horrifying series, "WEATHER UNDERGROUND HAS 'BLUEPRINT FOR TERROR,'" claiming to have evidence that it all was part of a coordinated conspiracy that would only grow:

> SAN FRANCISCO—Members of the radical Weather Underground have masterminded a wave of violence throughout the country by secretly organizing small bands of terrorists operating under a variety of names, the *Chicago Tribune* has learned. This previously undisclosed blueprint for terror has been pieced together in the last two weeks by federal investigators and police in San Francisco, where the Patricia Hearst trial has focused new attention on these far-flung radical activities. . . .
>
> The picture emerged from a detailed study of thousands of internal documents seized here in raids in recent weeks and from inside knowledge provided by at least two admitted terrorists who have turned informants. . . .
>
> Investigators noted that the emergence of the Weather group as the rallying force in the underground world of terrorism fits into a program espoused by the group five years ago. The program was adopted from a similar one used by South American guerillas and calls for a cadre of nine persons to fan out across the country and organize other nine-person cells. These cells would operate under different names, and eventually send their members out to form new cells. The process would continue until a national network of terrorists was built. "Bombings in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Seattle, and the San Francisco Bay area during the past year is evidence that these cells are in existence," one investigator said.

The next day the Associated Press reported that the FBI and Secret Service were investigating the testimony of an undercover informant that a "commando-style assassination team" from the San Francisco Bay area was planning attempts on Reagan's and Ford's lives at the Republican convention in Kansas City, "designed to throw the convention into complete chaos." The *Chicago Tribune*'s report contributed this detail: "From the intelligence we have been able to gather, the terror groups want to move their emphasis from bombings to other violent acts in the urban guerrilla handbook, like assassinations and kidnappings."

Another conservative strand came from New York, where "pro-life" activists took advantage of the federal campaign finance law to make sure television viewers in every last primary state knew that abortion was the most hideous sort of cold-blooded murder, through free TV commercials for a "Human Life" constitutional amendment. The trick, pulled together by the New York State Right to Life Party, was to invent a dummy presidential campaign. The candidate, named Ellen McCormack, was a Long Island housewife who wrote a column syndicated to Catholic newspapers called "Who Speaks for the Unborn?" All that these activists needed to do to haul in $100,000 in matching funds for her was to raise at least $5,000 in each of twenty states by February 1976, and prove "viability" by getting her name on some primary ballots. They got her listed in fifteen states—and were certified by the FEC as passing the funding threshold on February 18. The National Abortion Rights Action League filed suit against the scheme on technical grounds—some newspaper ads soliciting funds didn't say anything about a presidential campaign, just "YOU CAN FIGHT ABORTION and SAVE BABIES' LIVES by helping sponsor PRO-LIFE TV ADS"—and lost. The commercials went on the air during the game show *Name That Tune*. A loophole in the campaign finance law meant that every taxpayer in the United States had become a de facto antiabortion activist.

In the Tar Heel State, a barely noticed right-wing infrastructure worked to bring those waters to a primary-day boil. A columnist chasing Reagan up and down the Florida Gulf Coast had asked Lyn Nofziger if this was the end of the road. The rumpled, cynical, fast-talking, hard-drinking press secretary looked uncharacteristically sincere: "Wait 'til North Carolina."

WHAT WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN IN NORTH CAROLINA WAS IN PART A RESULT of that loophole in the new campaign finance law: the fact that independent groups could spend money without limit to help a political campaign, even a political campaign that accepted federal matching funds, so long as they did not coordinate their activities with that campaign. This would apply to an independent group like, say, the American Conservative Union. The ACU's chairman since 1971 was a perfervid ideological warrior named M. Stanton Evans. He was a Joseph McCarthy devotee, was the author of Young Americans for Freedom's 1960 manifesto the "Sharon Statement," and had only recently retired at the ripe old age of forty as editor of the *Indianapolis News*. Evans prevailed upon the ACU's board to commit huge resources to the presidential race. The ACU had begun, tentatively, with Illinois. It was in North Carolina that the organization went, as the poker players say, all in. It spent tens of thousands of dollars on newspaper and radio ads alone. Read in Evans's mellifluous voice, the radio ads presented a bill of indictment: "*Gerald Ford appointed Nelson Rockefeller. . . .*" It ran almost a thousand times.

And it came partly from the work of a senator unlike any other the world's greatest deliberate body had ever seen—the first pure electoral product of America's nascent new right.

Jesse Alexander Helms Jr. was born in the typical Southern small town of Monroe, North Carolina, in 1921, the year a progressive new governor took office in the South's most liberal state promising a "war for righteousness with the reactionary and unprogressive forces of our state." Helms's father—"Mr. Jesse"—was both the town's police chief and its fire chief. His family was made up of Baptist teetotalers—who didn't just hate liquor, the joke went, but hated the farmer who grew the corn that made the liquor. When he became a politician he liked to invoke his fondest childhood memory in speeches: "The honks and shrieks of the town band . . . the chilled lemonade—a nickel a glass . . . horses . . . prancing and snorting . . . both of the town's highly polished fire engines with a multitude of ecstatic youngsters perched atop them; the town's single police car—three sirens in a row in a sort of discordant symphony. . . . In the burning noontime sun, men and women—and little boys and girls, too—stood reverently as a prayer of thanksgiving was offered for the liberty and freedom which were God's gift to America. Nobody doubted it." He was describing the town's annual Independence Day parade—in a time, now, when *everybody* seemed to doubt it.

But if his vision of the world was almost militantly old-fashioned, the things that made Jesse Helms *Jesse Helms* were resolutely, ruthlessly modern. He was a master of electronic media and electronic public relations techniques. A high school newspaperman who said in his senior yearbook that his life's ambition was to be a columnist, he dropped out of tiny Wingate Junior College when he got a job reading proofs at the *Raleigh News & Observer*—then was recruited by the more conservative afternoon *Raleigh Times* as assistant city editor at the age of twenty. He discovered a passion for PR during wartime Navy basic training—and, when he was sent back to North Carolina as a recruiter, the joys of the radio microphone. By 1948 he was news director at a tiny but ambitious radio station, WRAL—where he put his editorial thumb on the scales for the U.S. Senate campaign of a McCarthyite reactionary named Willis Smith, who defeated the incumbent, the enlightened former president of the University of North Carolina, with the help, to take one example, of a handbill depicting the incumbent's wife alone with a black man, looking a little bit as if they were dancing. The advertising manager of the *News & Observer* told a Helms biographer that he'd seen the WRAL news director scissoring several other people out of the picture.

He went to Washington as Smith's executive assistant—and then, tiring of that, took a job as spokesman and lobbyist for the North Carolina Bankers Association, which had the advantage of providing him with a platform for his political views, in a full-page column in monthly trade magazine he edited. Those views were ahead of their time. Other Dixie ideologues, in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, were talking about keeping unelected Yankee judges away from their public schools. Helms, a devotee of the Austrian libertarian economist Ludwig von Mises, instead argued that if they did away with public schools *altogether*, "[p]olitical sociologists would forever be unable to dictate terms and procedures to the people of America regarding our schools.... Unless our Negro citizens submit more easily than we predict they will, North Carolina does not have the simple choice between segregated schools and integrated schools. Our only choice is between instead public schools and free-choice private schools." His column, in the *Tarheel Banker*, was modestly titled "By Jesse Helms."

These views made him a Tarheel household name when, in 1960, WRAL got a license to open a TV station (slogan: "The miracle of America is the free enterprise system") and Helms was made news director. At the end of every newscast, he recited one of his own editorials, which were rebroadcast every morning and on the radio over the seventy or so stations of his boss's "Tobacco Network." His broadcast demeanor was almost deliberately bland—akin to his owlish horn rims and shapeless, old-fashioned suits, like those of a small-town banker, bought off the rack at a conservative Raleigh haberdashery. Aides once advised him to spruce up his image. Wisely, he did not let them prevail. In 1972 the celebrity ran for the Senate. He always wore American flag and Mason pins on his lapel, and a POW bracelet around his wrist. His slogan was "Elect Jesse Helms—He's one of us." (His opponent, who had an ethnic name—Galifianakis, as in "McGovern-Galifianakis cut and run" policies in Vietnam, and "McGovern-Galifianakis welfare giveaways"—was not one of us.) In his campaign he pledged to "[r]esist with all the strength I can muster the destructive tactics of the Teddy Kennedys, the Hubert Humphreys, the Muskies and McGoverns—and all the rest of the wrecking crew now dominating the United States Senate." He had in mind some destructive tactics of his own.

He won, though Helms the supposed budget hawk went into debt to do it—which turned out to be a very good thing. To retire the debt, his political deputy Tom Ellis, a California native who had transferred from Dartmouth College to North Carolina and fell in love with the "Southern way of life" and Southern slash-and-burn politics—regarding which he had the zeal of the convert—turned to Richard Viguerie, the master of ideological direct mail and interlocking political committees. Thus Helms became the New Right hustlers' second most useful name, behind Reagan's, for signing fund-raising appeals. That created a set of debts, which were paid back to Helms in fund-raising and publicity favors, and these helped Ellis begin to build a direct mail empire of his own, on his boss's behalf. Soon, Helms's "Congressional Club" and its satellites dwarfed the budgets of North Carolina's Republican and Democratic parties.

It worked, to take an example from the 1980s, like this. All the names on the Congressional Club's long mailing lists received a missive including a picture of a beautiful young family with two little girls, taken from their Christmas card. In the letter the senator recollected waiting for a flight in an airport in Alaska:

"The three-year-old was sitting on her mother's lap and the five-year-old was perched on the arm of the chair. The mother was reading a story.... I moved over and introduced myself." He played, he said, a silly little game with them that he liked to play with his grandchildren. Then the family's flight number—007—was called. That was the flight number, as all the readers would recognize, of a plane to Korea the Soviets accidentally shot down.

Not accidentally, right-wing conspiracists like Helms insisted. The letter concluded, "It was difficult to express the shock and horror and anger that I felt, and still feel, about the Soviet Union's wanton, deliberate, premeditated, callous, and cruel destruction of 269 innocent people—including those two little girls." It demanded "a renewed understanding of Communist brutality." Luckily, he was ready to help—if he could stay in Washington. "Can you help once more with a special significant contribution? Without your help, our work cannot continue. Jesse Helms."

Complaints flowed in, including one from the family, who had never authorized the use of their image or story. Helms and Ellis ignored them. More important was the money that arrived in a torrent. And that the message—Senator Helms stands up to the Communists—came through. Meanwhile, another message-building component of the Helms machine clanked along—on the floor of the Senate. Inspired by the tactics of a reactionary Democrat from Alabama named James Allen, the new senator, ninety-fifth in seniority, learned to offer numerous unrelated amendments to big bills that needed to pass, sometimes a dozen amendments or more, each requiring a certain amount of debate, to leverage one-man filibusters against ideas conservatives didn't like—such as the federal juvenile delinquency program (he was the only senator to vote against it); antipollution devices in cars (he attracted two supporters for that); reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act; and, of course, legal abortion—"the human holocaust with no parallel in history," he would say, noting several cities where there were supposedly more abortions than births, adding, "Washington, D.C., is one of them."

He sometimes introduced bills of his own—for instance, to strip the courts of the authority to rule on the constitutionality of school prayer. It didn't matter how many times it failed, or by how many votes. A biographer wrote that each "was like another WRAL editorial, drawn up to make a point.... He was reaching out to a national constituency, to frustrated Americans among whom his hard-line tactics stood for courage and leadership rather than obstruction and obfuscation." He liked to say, "I know nothing about being a politician."

Ironically, such tactics, and his status as a conservative hero second only to Reagan by 1976, would not have been possible without the institutional reforms put in place by the Watergate Babies, which were supposed to be liberal. As a Democratic colleague explained (though Helms hardly considered liberals his "colleagues"), "The consequences of his being a pariah don't matter as much as they used to. The leadership can't discipline a senator as it once did. In the old days, you couldn't get a vote if the leadership didn't want to have one. Now it's gone the other way.... People are coming to realize the only way to deal with him is not to afford him the usual courtesies, to recognize that he's fighting trench warfare and they have to fight it in the same way. He and his people drag you down in the gutter to fight them . . . it's wreaking havoc on the institution."

What Helms was doing in the Senate, and what Tom Ellis did with his banks of computers, fueled one another, upending every old model for building senatorial power—patiently, cordially, honoring the venerable maxim (beloved by gracious Southern solons like his senior Tarheel colleague Sam Ervin) "Fight today, friends tomorrow." Instead, he was a McLuhanite politician: the medium was the message. Observed a frustrated Democratic senator, "with these interlocking political committees of his," Helms "works not so much within the Senate as outside. Often the whole purpose of his programming a vote is politics, so then he can use it with a press release or by mailing off thousands of letters by pushing a button on a computer." Organizing by building a mailing list favors a politics of melodrama, never the give-and-take between the myriad interests groups that make up partisan, let alone bipartisan, coalitions. It makes the political party a mere vehicle of convenience—indeed, Helms had been a registered Democrat until 1970, and had been one of the leading advocates for a third, conservative, party following Nixon's resignation. As a fellow Republican put it, "It's frustrating, often impossible to get serious business done. You might be working on a foreign aid bill or a change in the debt limit and all of a sudden you find you're voting on school prayer or abortion. Helms is no respecter of the institution. He uses the Senate for his own ends, his own causes, and they are not the same as the goals of the country."

It was, however, splendid for flushing out angry anti-Establishment right-wing voters in a Southern state for a presidential primary.

When Gerald Ford announced, late in 1975, that his campaign chairman in the state would be the moderate governor, James Holshouser—Helms's one rival for primacy in North Carolina Republican politics—Helms decided to turn his mighty machine to defeating the president. Ellis confronted John Sears—whom he respected for his expertise, and despised for his indifference to conservative ideology—and demanded complete control of the Reagan campaign, right down to the candidate's schedule, as the condition for Jesse Helms's help. Sears gave in. (Why not? Sears might have reasoned. He hadn't drawn a paycheck since February.) Helms's cast of characters would eventually become household names, at least among political junkies. Nobody had heard of them then. A twenty-two-year-old, born in Havana, named Alex Castellanos. A young Jewish conservative named Arthur Finkelstein, who'd engineered James Buckley's Senate win on the New York Conservative Party line in 1970. And Ellis himself—one of the most influential strategists in American electoral politics. Quietly, he'd been engineering efforts to get Democrats to reregister as Republicans to vote against the liberal turncoat Gerald Ford, and get young people to register for the first time, but that would become evident only later.

The Dixie boys opened up the thinking of what had turned into a stodgy campaign, for instance on the matter of the original source of their candidate's celebrity. Citizens for Reagan had polls indicating that foregrounding Reagan's Hollywood past didn't hurt him—it helped him. But Sears had directed the campaign to avoid any intimation of Hollywood glamour. Instead he commissioned a series of commercials that were deliberately unglamorous: poorly lit, poorly photographed footage of the candidate at citizen press conferences, in the cinema verité style then fashionable among politicians hoping to prove their antipolitical cred. But then, most politicians hoping to prove their anti-Establishment cred weren't Ronald Reagan. Antipolitics wasn't the only thing popular that spring: so was Reagan-style nostalgia. James Brolin and Jill Clayburgh were in theaters reenacting one of classic Hollywood's most storied romances in *Gable and Lombard* (Lombard was killed in a plane crash while publicizing World War II Liberty Bonds); F. Scott Fitzgerald's inside-Hollywood novel *The Last Tycoon* was in production at Paramount. Ellis ash-canned the cinema verité—and brought in Jimmy Stewart, who'd just finished an old-fashioned Western with John Wayne, *The Shootist*, to stump beside Reagan each and every day in the campaign's final week. Paul Laxalt, the original Senate booster of Reagan's presidential campaign, persuaded him to toss his note cards and trust his instincts instead. ("What kind of foreign policy is it when a little tinhorn dictator in Panama says he is going to start guerrilla warfare against us unless we give him the Panama Canal?") Reagan told Nancy that going a whole day speaking without his notes made him feel alive. Laxalt thought he looked like a little kid: he was flying.

The candidate had an idea: another bit, as it were, of nostalgia—one of those five-, fifteen-, or thirty-minute, look-at-the-camera-and-talk speeches that had been the staple of political TV until they were superseded by the slick thirty-second spot. He had been begging his campaign managers to do one—like what he had done in 1964 for Barry Goldwater, the one David Broder called "the most successful national political debut since William Jennings Bryan electrified the 1896 Democratic Convention with the 'Cross of Gold' speech." The answer always came back: "Gov, that stuff worked for you back in 1964, but this is different." Years later, Lyn Nofziger had to laugh: "Everybody wants to do something their own way with Ronald Reagan. And the best way is just to let him talk. Nobody ever figures it out. Each time, you have to go through this whole hassle."

Ellis loved the idea of a just-the-issues conservative appeal. This time the hassle involved Sears, who apparently emerged from his idleness to put his foot down against the ridiculous idea. Reagan's chief of staff Mike Deaver and press secretary Nofziger pressed him to give it a shot (perhaps they pointed out it might raise enough money to pay Sears's back salary). They had the film in hand—a thirty-minute shoot they'd done for the homestretch in Florida after a TV station donated the time to both candidates. They would only have to edit out the palm trees.

And that is indeed what they did.

One reviewer—Elizabeth Drew—found it "rather poor. Reagan *jumped from subject to* subject, just as he had in his early speeches, *when he shuffled his* four-by-six cards; he talked too fast about too many things, from energy to Social Security to the Panama Canal." But *New Yorker* writers did not have a vote in North Carolina Republican primaries. The ones who did have votes responded to the message that Gerald Ford was surreptitiously giving away the might of God's chosen nation, for free, to a Marxist tinhorn dictator in Panama—just like Franklin Roosevelt had given away Eastern Europe at Yalta—like people hearing the Holy Word.

The money started pouring in—literally too fast to count. Instead the campaign in Washington established a line of revolving credit with a bank that let them estimate the take by weighing the dozens of bags of cash and checks lying around. Meanwhile, underneath the radar, the gears in Ellis's machine continued to clank. A flyer akin to the one Helms scissored in 1950 depicting the opponent's wife dancing with a black man suddenly began appearing: it reprinted an article in which Ford said the black Republican senator from Massachusetts, Edward Brooke, "should be considered" for the vice presidency. (Reagan got to have it both ways on that one, loudly denouncing it to the press while benefiting from the race-baiting, too.) Meanwhile, all year, an enthusiastic young Congressional Club staffer had been visiting county courthouses to forage through whatever back rooms and attics held the lists of Republican primary records. He pulled together a roll of eighty thousand names, an accomplishment never attempted before—almost half the number of votes cast and about eighty thousand more names than the Ford organization had—to receive literature and get-out-the-vote phone calls.

Meanwhile the President of the United States coasted. One of his only two days in the state in the month of March even entered the crowded annals of Gerald Ford humor: a rousing speech to a Future Homemakers of America convention concluding, "I say—and it is with *emphasis* and *conviction*—that homemaking is good for America. I say that homemaking is not out of date and I reject strongly such accusations."

The president had read the Reagan campaign's reviews in the papers—

William F. Buckley's column, Monday, March 22: "Ronald Reagan, it would appear, has lost his fight for the presidential nomination."

James J. Kirkpatrick, Tuesday, March 23: "His role in the '76 campaign is just about played out."

—so why strain himself?

And on that very Tuesday, one of those balmy, sunny days that always favor incumbents over insurgents, North Carolina voted.

The Reagan gang was in La Crosse, Wisconsin, where the vote was to take place in two weeks. ABC's Frank Reynolds asked two listless handlers who were going through the motions, working for a nearly dead campaign, if they'd heard the results. They hadn't. Why pay attention to another defeat?

"Well, I have, and your man is winning."

They were gobsmacked. They hadn't quite believed it would work. The idled regular campaign had all but packed it in. Now, they'd beaten the president of the United States by 52.4 to 46 percent—they learned the first time a sitting president had been defeated in a primary in which he had actively campaigned.

Ronald Reagan, too, had been born again.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

"Always Shuck the Tamale"

"BORN AGAIN." THE PHRASE WAS A NEW ONE IN THE LEXICON THAT POLITICAL season. It was the title of a new memoir by former prisoner 23226 at Maxwell Federal Prison camp. "In one sense, I had lost everything," Chuck Colson wrote. "But in another sense I had found everything, all that really matters: a personal relationship with the living God. My life had been dramatically transformed by Jesus Christ." Then there was Jimmy Carter. Desolate after his loss in the 1966 governor's race, the story ran, he took a walk in the woods with his sister, Ruth Carter Stapleton, the one who operated a faith-healing ministry. "I had a personal spiritual experience that is difficult to explain to people who have never had such an experience," he said in an Associated Press article that appeared in May; he accepted Christ as his personal savior, and that day his life began anew. He explained, "Many of the newsmen who asked about this have never had this experience. Some of them are downright cynical about it. I think it worries some of them." The article was called "Carter's Convictions Mystify News Media."

Those convictions had only recently been relatively private. They first surfaced on the campaign trail during a small fund-raiser in a home in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, when he told donors, "I recognized for the first time that I lacked something very precious—a complete commitment to Christ, a presence of the Holy Spirit in my life in a more profound and personal way. And since then I've had an inner peace and inner conviction and assurance that transformed my life for the better." He assured them, "I don't think I'm ordained by God to be President." He added that the "only prayer that I've ever had concerning the election is that I do the right thing. And if I win or lose, my religious faith won't be shaken." He elaborated the next day at a press conference: "It was not a profound stroke of miracle. It wasn't a voice of God from heaven. It was not anything of that kind. It wasn't mysterious. It might have been the same kind of experience as millions of people have who do become Christians in a deeply personal way."

Just about simultaneously, on the cover of *New York* magazine, Richard Reeves published "Carter's Secret: Understanding America's Spiritual Crisis." He quoted a *New Republic* columnist: "My impression is that audiences yearn to believe Jimmy Carter. They're looking for something. It is his manner and tone." Carter attributed some of his power to pull in voters to his experience pulling in souls: after his born-again experience, Reeves reported, Carter traveled to New York City as a Baptist missionary. He wrote, "No doubt Jimmy Carter knows what he is doing when he refers constantly and reverently to 'my daddy' and 'my mamma.'" Reeves concluded that maybe this "highly sophisticated 51-year-old man sounding like the thinking man's Billy Sunday" understood "something the rest of us don't." Observed *New York* magazine's editors in a preface, "What liberals perceive as a political crisis in the country may in fact be a crisis of the spirit . . . and Jimmy Carter has figured that out."

Other scribes started investigating. The *Washington Post*'s Myra MacPherson looked into the beliefs of his sister. Her column, headlined "Devout 'Minister' Healing the Wounds of the 'Inner Child'"—note the distancing quotation marks—described what Ruth Stapleton Carter called her "ministry of inner healing," in which she "takes her patients back to their childhood then conducts them on a trip of faith and imagination, traveling through their troubled childhood, but this time traveling with Jesus." She reported Ruth's recollection of the dialogue on Jimmy's walk in the woods with her: "You and I are both Baptists, but what is it that you have and that I haven't got?" he was supposed to have asked, and she replied, "Jimmy, through my hurt and pain it finally got so bad off I had to forget everything I was. What it amounts to in religious terms is total commitment. I belong to Jesus. Everything I am." She then said she guided her brother through a mental inventory of what he had to be willing to give up if he wished for a total commitment to Christ: money, friends, family—even political ambition. She said he then "put his face in his hands and cried like a baby."

The candidate denied that particular detail, and others. And in pious North Carolina, where he hoped to finish off George Wallace once and for all, he began telling the story on his own. He would say, like a convert to Werner Erhard's est, "I didn't get any sense of accomplishment when I achieved success and I felt like my religious beliefs were shallow and just a matter of self-pride." But now that he was born again, he felt otherwise.

To these hard-bitten ink-stained wretches—those from the North who wrote about evangelical faith, a historian observed, "as if it were as alien to American culture as a Balinese cockfight," and those from the South, who'd seen all too many hustling piety-peddlers who, as they used to say about old Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, "ran around the woods with his Bible in one hand and his pecker in another"—this all was just a little bit much. To intellectual sophisticates, it was like a visitation from another planet. Perhaps they had read a widely reported recent study by the religious historian James Hitchcock, who predicted that soon American society would have an "unbelieving popular majority." "Christians must accept being a definite minority for the time being," Hitchcock told a reporter.

The scholar was well wide of the mark. That February, two thousand delegates packed the combined convention of the National Religious Broadcasters and the National Association of Evangelicals. For the first time, a president addressed them—"The faith of our Fathers is living still in America today," Gerald Ford said—and so did the Christian conservative congressman John Conlan, wrapped up in a knock-down, drag-out primary for Senate in Arizona, where he campaigned against fellow conservative Sam Steiger by asking voters if they wanted "a Jew from New York telling Arizona what to do." Conlan said his goal as a politician was to make this a "Christian nation." In a profile of Chuck Colson in the *New York Times Magazine*, Garry Wills reported estimates that the evangelical movement encompassed some 67 million Americans—40 million of voting age, or about a quarter of the electorate. No wonder President Ford, one of whose public liaisons in the White House, Ted Mars, proclaimed, "We believe our nation must come back to God or else," stopped by the evangelicals' convention to say hello.

One evangelical broadcaster, Oral Roberts, reached seven million viewers a week on 349 local and satellite stations. Another, Pat Robertson, had his own satellite network. A third, Jerry Falwell, proprietor of *The Old-Time Gospel Hour*, was touring around the country with a group of fresh-faced, dancing, singing youngsters for Bicentennial "I Love America" rallies. "There's no question about it," he'd say on TV. "This nation was intended to be a Christian nation by our founding fathers." Reagan, for his part, was part of the flock of the muscular evangelical Donn Moomaw, a former football all-American at UCLA, who assured fellow evangelicals of his most famous parishioner's "alive faith."

Christian popular culture exploded. Twenty thousand gathered in a pasture outside Disney World for a three-day rock-concert-style "Jesus '76" rally starring Robertson, Conlan, Pat Boone, and Hal Lindsey, who swooped down to the stage from the sky in helicopters, like at Woodstock—then, in Mercer, Pennsylvania, the same show drew seventy thousand, more than half of whom camped out on the site. Christian couples devoured Beverly and Tim LaHaye's *The Act of Marriage: The Beauty of Sexual Love*, which explained of the clitoris that God “placed it there for your enjoyment,” and excoriated the husband “who told his frustrated wife, ‘Nice girls aren't supposed to climax.’ Today's wife knows better.” The *Los Angeles Times*, that May, reported on a theological debate within the evangelical community over the inerrancy of the Bible as if it were a contest between the Rams and the Jets. Two wealthy Los Angeles men printed 2.5 million copies of the 1910 tract *The Fundamentals* and sent it, reportedly, to every pastor, evangelist, missionary, and church worker in the country. Ten other rich Christians pledged $25,000 each to launch a “Third Century Index”—a rating of congressmen on a 1–100 scale, like the ones published by the AFL-CIO and the liberal Americans for Democratic Action. Their spokesman, Rus Walton—a principal in Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign—explained, ‘The vision is to rebuild the foundations of the Republic as it was when first founded—a ‘Christian Republic.’”

The conversion of Reagan's former archenemy Eldridge Cleaver, the Black Panther leader, to conservative Christianity would soon be in the papers. “I'd like to caution people that the simple things we've been taught from childhood in the end are the most profound,” Cleaver said. Enough ordinary Americans agreed that when two private citizens petitioned the Federal Communications Commission complaining of the way “back-to-the-Bible fundamentalism” was monopolizing the portions of the AM and FM bands reserved for educational programming, and a rumor ensued that the FCC sought to ban religious broadcasting, the federal agency was flooded with fifty thousand letters of complaint.

I FOUND IT, the bumper stickers distributed by the Campus Crusade for Christ proclaimed. Jimmy Carter had found it, too. “I'm not afraid to see my life ended,” he told Bill Moyers on the latter's PBS program later that spring. “I don't have any fear at all of death. I feel like I'm doing the best I can, and if I get elected President, I'll have a chance to magnify my own influence maybe in a beneficial way. If I don't get elected President, I'll go back to Plains.”

Moyers asked: did he have any doubts about himself, about God, about life?

“I can't think of any.”

• • •

IT SOUNDED GOOD TO VOTERS—THE SORT FLOCKING TO EST, TO EVANgelicalism, to something, anything, to anchor a firm sense of meaning in their lives. The fact remained, though, that for the guardians of the permanent Washington establishment—who were, Reeves wrote, in a “small panic” over Carter, whom one of the Washington press corps, the *Times*' James Reston, called “Wee Jimmy”—it was just one more thing that made James Earl Carter sound so *weird*.

The people *around him* were weird, come to think of it—Hamilton Jordan, who almost always wore a denim jacket, and stuck with boots even when he had to wear a suit; Jody Powell, who looked like a boy; Charles Kirbo, to whom Carter was personally closest, and who a political correspondent for *New York* thought “sounds like a gorilla”; Jerry Rafshoon, who sat on desks and tables instead of chairs, and was quite the player in the ad game . . . in Atlanta, Georgia, where Carter had inscrutably chosen to base his campaign, surrounded by this tight little group. “How can he be nominated?” asked Ambassador Averell Harriman, the eighty-five-year-old emperor of the Georgetown cocktail circuit. “I don't know him, and neither do any of my friends.” Another insider, a journalist, said, “Carter can't be President. He doesn't know his way around this city.”

It was around then, with a man they considered a weirdo unquestionably ahead in the Democratic race, that this cozy little D.C. village of friends began to talk up one of their own: former senator, former vice president, former three-time presidential candidate, and onetime nominee Hubert Horatio Humphrey. Surely he could be nominated without having to enter him in all these meddlesome primaries—just like in 1968. If “old Hubert” was picked, one of his friends explained, possibly not quite joking, “most people at the Federal City Club wouldn't have to change a name on their rolodexes.” It was widely presumed the AFL-CIO was planning to endorse him and was just holding out for the right signal from him. He certainly seemed interested; the day after the North Carolina primary he sat with reporters for an on-the-record conversation for an hour—and made a veiled swipe at Carter: “Running against Washington won't be a winner in November,” he said. “It's essentially an attack on the federal programs, and that's an attack on the poor, the blacks, the minorities and the cities. It's a disguised new form of racism, a disguised new form of conservatism.”

Humphrey was the grand old man of Democratic politics. But the old man's very intimacy with the tragedies and triumphs of Democratic presidencies past was precisely what made him disgusting to the brighteyed tribunes of antipolitics—like the *Village Voice*'s James Wolcott, who wrote, "As far as I'm concerned, any party which again—again!—selects Hubert Vietnam Humphrey to carry its banner deserves the fiery fate which befalls a zeppelin piloted by George C. Scott," star recently of *The Hindenburg*.

The possibility that the old standby might any day answer the Democratic Establishment's draft threw a spanner in the works of every other candidate's strategy. So it was that Carter, the day before the Illinois primary, made a pilgrimage to the nation's capital to pay obeisance to that Establishment, at a dinner with Clark Clifford, the mandarin who in 1973 had decorously suggested Richard Nixon resign the presidency in favor of a bipartisan "government of national unity"; Katharine Graham, the publisher of her family's newspaper the *Washington Post*; and Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin, Humphrey's biggest booster in the Senate. Carter also gave a second extended interview to Elizabeth Drew. The first time, he had been short and snappish. This time he was solicitous and welcoming.

Then he jetted off to New York—the better to be surrounded by network cameras as he took in the news of his victory in Illinois.

HE HAD GOOD REASON TO START MAKING NICER WITH THE PRESS: THE reporters were on to him. The new narrative was no longer "Jimmy Who?" It was: Jimmy the Hustler, who had mastered the old bunkum artist's motto that if you can fake sincerity, you've got it made. Elizabeth Drew's interview with George Wallace ("He talks about spending all that time on his *kneeeeees*") ran in the *New Yorker*. The *New York Times Magazine* ran Joseph Lelyveld's profile of Jerry Rafshoon, in which the adman promoted himself as the man behind the curtain, prompting the wizard, through the long months of 1975, to speak not from the heart, but purely on the basis of audience response. ("We used to say that's a C performance or that's a B performance or that's an A performance," Rafshoon recalled of the candidate who was supposed never to be performing at all. "We knew instinctively in our minds what made an A and what made a B.")

If you can fake sincerity, you've got it made. If you can project humility brashly, you've got it made. People wanted to believe.

He now had two new opponents. On March 12, California governor Jerry Brown said he soon would enter the presidential race. Carter, traveling in California, responded by announcing he would enter every primary in the nation, no matter who contested him. On March 18, Frank Church finally announced his presidential campaign. He did so just as his work investigating the CIA returned to the news, when Richard Nixon released his answers to a set of questions from the Church Committee over his administration's role in overthrowing Salvador Allende in Chile. Nixon wrote, newspapers reported, that whatever he might or might not have done, he was only continuing Kennedy's and Johnson's policies, and concluded, "I realize it is in vogue to rail against covert activities and clandestine operations," but "the pendulum has swung too far." Church responded in his pious way, acknowledging that his committee had indeed uncovered abuses by Johnson and Kennedy in South America, but that the resulting lesson was not that "illegal actions were justified," but that "once government officials start believing they have the power to act secretly and outside the law we have started down a long slippery slope which culminates in Watergate."

The Democratic race turned south. North Carolina voted on the twenty-third; South Carolina held Democratic precinct caucuses throughout the month. In these states Carter campaigned like Wallace always did—with a country band, which performed "Dixie." That provided the excuse for reporters to pummel him on the inconsistencies in his claim never to have courted Wallace as a political ally in that now-infamous little room off the governor's office in Atlanta. He responded testily: "I didn't care whether he came into Georgia to campaign or not. I never promised him anything." They homed in on his vagueness on the issues—which Carter then turned around, martyrlike, as an unfair attack on him by the Yankee Establishment press: "I don't feel intimidated. I won't be pressured into making rash statements." Interviewers also asked him about a campaign photograph that seemed to play up his resemblance to John F. Kennedy. His handlers claimed never to have noticed such a resemblance at all.

He won North Carolina with 53.6 percent to Wallace's 34.75 percent. Also-rans were dropping like flies: Sargent Shriver suspended his campaign on the twenty-second; Fred Harris's telephones were cut off on the twenty-fourth. The assaults affected the Carter juggernaut hardly a whit.

THE HEADLINE IN THE *MILWAUKEE SENTINEL*'S FIRST EDITION ON APRIL 7 was "CARTER UPSET BY UDALL"—followed, in the next edition, after a nail-biting few hours, a headline in the final edition reading "CARTER EDGES OUT UDALL." (When it started looking close, Carter shrewdly made sure aides ran out and got a first edition showing Udall had won, so he could hold it up for photographers just in case it turned out Udall hadn't.) Ford won in Wisconsin by a healthy 11 percentage points because Reagan had canceled his appearances there to prepare for a national TV address. The speech's drafters were adding another count in the anti-détente indictment: as reported by Evans and Novak, Henry Kissinger's close aide Helmut Sonnenfeldt had told a London meeting of U.S. ambassadors that "it must be our policy to strive for an evolution that makes the relationship between the Eastern Europeans and the Soviet Union an organic one," and that an "inorganic, unnatural relationship [that tries to divide Russia and Eastern Europe] is a far greater danger to world peace than the conflict between East and West"—a doctrine, Reagan thundered, "that slaves should accept their fate."

Meanwhile, evidence mounted that the victory on January 20, 1977, might be Pyrrhic—that whoever the next president was, he'd be remembered by history as the captain of a capsizing ship.

Patty Hearst was convicted of armed robbery on Monday, March 21; the *Winston-Salem Journal* worried about a proliferation of an "ever-growing number of Patricia-Hearst-like personalities in this country," due to the decline in "the transmission of ethics from generation to generation."

Was the end of the line coming for America's world dominance? Henry Kissinger apparently thought so. Boomed Reagan in that nationally televised foreign policy speech: "Now we must ask if someone is giving away our own freedom." Which someone? Guess who. "Dr. Kissinger is quoted as saying that he thinks of the United States as Athens and the Soviet Union as Sparta. 'The day of the United States is past and today is the day of the Soviet Union.' And he added, 'My job as Secretary of State is to negotiate the most acceptable second-best position possible.'"

Reagan didn't cite a source. But a campaign spokesman confirmed it came from a new memoir by Admiral Elmo "Bud" Zumwalt, who was running for the Senate as a Democrat from Virginia. Kissinger's top aide, Lawrence Eagleburger, replied, "He did not say that. It is pure invention and totally irresponsible." Another spokesman said the words were "completely contrary to United States foreign policy"; the White House released a ten-page point-by-point refutation. But plenty of people had heard Kissinger say similar things before. Reagan said, "I will stand by everything I said." A historian later discovered a memo in which Zumwalt transcribed a call he received on March 26 in which an unidentified voice told him, "You should know that on at least two occasions recently Kissinger has said to [Soviet ambassador Anatoly] Dobrynin 'an accident should happen to Admiral Zumwalt.'"

Here was one of the nation's most distinguished retired military officers, convinced he was being set up for a hit by the secretary of state: all kinds of Americans were paranoid these days. Readers that month were snapping up Irving Wallace's new thriller *The R Document*, which had already been sold to the movies. It was set on the eve of the ratification of the Thirty-fifth Amendment, which suspended the Bill of Rights during an epidemic of violent crime and served as cover for the evil FBI director's plan to assassinate the president and set up concentration camps. Nature continued her revenge: on April 17 at Cincinnati's Riverfront Stadium a swarm of five thousand to ten thousand bees hovered over the on-deck circle, then took up residence in the San Francisco Giants' dugout, forcing a thirty-five-minute delay of the game. That was followed soon after by a panic over African clawed frogs—exotic pets imported from South Africa, which bred beyond control and took over the waterways around Riverside, California, exterminating the native fish population. Then came the killer bees, once more: after they swarmed a bus driver in Rio de Janeiro, running him off the road and into another bus, the House passed a bill regulating the importation of honeybee semen into the United States.

What times. What a country. One entrant on the nonfiction side of the *New York Times* bestseller list was called *Winning Through Intimidation*. It fought it out for the top spot with a book that made the fly-on-the-Oval-Office-wall case that Nixon had come closer to meltdown in August 1974 than even the most paranoid dared imagine.

The most melodramatic scene in Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward's *The Final Days* became a subject for a classic *Saturday Night Live* sketch: Henry Kissinger (played by John Belushi) visits a sozzled Nixon (Dan Aykroyd) in the Lincoln sitting room, whining self-pityingly, "Will history treat me more kindly than my contemporaries?" He breaks into sobs, begging Kissinger to get down on his knees and join him in prayer. Aykroyd: "Don't you *want* to pray, you Christ killer?" Belushi: "I don't vant to get into zat again, Mr. President. Excuse me, I've got to go warn the Strategic Air Command to ignore all presidential orders." That referenced two of the book's other mind-blowing revelations: that Kissinger found Nixon a raging anti-Semite, and that Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger ordered military commanders to ignore Nixon's orders as the presidency slipped through his fingers. Still another was that Kissinger considered Nixon ragingly stupid: "Don't ever write anything more complicated than a *Reader's Digest* article for Nixon," he supposedly instructed his aides.

It also depicted a president on the verge of suicide. "You fellows in your business," he was depicted telling Alexander Haig, "you have a way of handling problems like this. Somebody leaves a pistol in the drawer. I don’t have a pistol”—“as if,” Woodward and Bernstein wrote, “he were half asking to be given one.” Haig was reported to have passed on orders to keep the president away from pills. His son-in-law Edward Cox said Nixon stalked the White House halls at night, “talking to pictures of former Presidents.” (Aykroyd to a painting of Kennedy: “Having sex with women within these very walls! That never happened when Dick Nixon was in the White House!” Another of the book’s revelations was that Pat and Dick hadn’t had sex in fourteen years.) Showing up at noon meetings so drunk that treasury secretary Simon thought he was acting like a “windup doll.” Pat spending all day in bed, drunk (he’d promised her in 1962, after all, that he’d never run for office again).

The book was a sensation, outselling *All the President’s Men* two to one. The initial printing of two hundred thousand was the largest in Simon & Schuster’s history but proved to be not nearly large enough: one bookstore reported selling a hundred copies a day. In the popular culture, it became known, simply, as “the Book.” The paperback rights sold for a record $1.55 million.

It was also ferociously controversial—as Woodward and Bernstein knew it would be. They had kept the manuscript under lock and key. The authors broke journalistic precedent by not naming sources or including any footnotes for the reported dialogue, and many of the principals denied having said the words attributed to them. The book also reported the supposed inner thoughts of the characters. Ford’s former press secretary Jerry terHorst called it “fictionalized journalism.” Typical letters to the editor to *Newsweek*, which ran prepublication excerpts: “I am completely repulsed. . . . They are gossipy little men,” and, “You two can be compared to Judas as you sold the heart and soul of a man for a few pieces of silver. May God forgive you for the sorrow you have caused Mr. Nixon and his family.” The affair might well have damaged its authors’ reputations irrevocably—were those authors not enjoying the roseate glow that accompanied the debut of the actual fictionalization of their journalism on the silver screen, starring Robert Redford as Bob Woodward and Dustin Hoffman as Carl Bernstein.

All the President’s Men had its Washington premiere at the Kennedy Center before 1,100 people, where the all-star Hollywood-and-D.C. crowd had weathered the ferocious scramble for twenty-five-dollar tickets for the surreal experience of watching Howard Hunt and his Cubans commit burglary onscreen just down the street from where it actually happened. It provided a sort of synthesis of genres then dominating theaters: disaster movies, like George C. Scott’s *The Hindenburg*, which were actually otherwise frequently optimistic and heartening, with Americans from all walks of life pulling together to save the day; nostalgic romps (one of them, *Midway*, an unlikely hit, was about the days when America won its wars); and horrifying world-turned-upside-down depictions of America gone mad, like the new picture *Taxi Driver*, in which a deranged former marine plying his trade down Manhattan’s filth-strewn streets tries to assassinate a presidential candidate, in part to impress a preteen prostitute, in part to get back at a woman repulsed when he took her to a pornographic movie on a date (he somehow in all the confusion ends up celebrated as a national hero for saving the candidate’s life). On March 29, another such portrait of America gone mad, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, became only the second picture to win all five major Academy Awards (Best Picture, Actor in Lead Role, Actress in Lead Role, Director, and Screenplay) since *It Happened One Night* in 1934.

All the President’s Men was nostalgic in its way, too: it was basically a police procedural, in which the two indefatigable, mismatched detectives patiently assembled clues to a world in moral chaos, resolved into order against all the odds. In the last shot the bad guys were depicted as being squarely nailed dead to rights, as ever-more-definitive newspaper copy was clacked out on Woodward’s or Bernstein’s typewriter. It was a colossal hit—the vehicle by which millions of Americans finally figured out what Watergate had truly been about. The picture even made the cover of *Time* magazine.

Watergate was everywhere that presidential primary season, still. Book after book: Jimmy Breslin’s bestseller *How the Good Guys Finally Won;* Jeb Magruder’s and Chuck Colson’s memoirs and soon one from Maureen “Mo” Dean; Theodore White’s *Breach of Faith. Texas Monthly* began its ongoing series, “Heroes for Post-Watergate America.” Panasonic ran full-page magazine ads proposing, “How to make sure the candidate of your choice lives up to his word. . . . It’s easy. With Panasonic portable cassette tape recorders. All with built-in condenser microphones. So you can record your candidate, just about anywhere his promises take him.” A satirical faux documentary, *The Faking of the President*, debuted. It depicted Ron Ziegler dressed as a Nazi, Nixon stealing flowers from the grave of FDR’s terrier Fala to place beside Checkers’s headstone, and Nixon tearfully confessing. At its premiere in Salt Lake City, during a Mormon convention, the overflow crowd rioted twenty minutes into the screening, tearing up seats, breaking a glass showcase, and overturning a car and setting it on fire.

One place the ongoing fascination with Watergate couldn’t have been too popular was the White House. On March 21 the *New York Times* profiled Ford campaign headquarters. The article began with a young volunteer suggesting the office needed a paper shredder to reduce the volume of trash. “‘Oh, gee, I don't think so,’ Peter F. Kaye, the campaign spokesman, remembers having replied, with an equanimity that hid a shuddering awareness of how inappropriate the recommendation was. The swift burial of the paper shredder idea was one illustration of an unwritten rule at Mr. Ford's campaign headquarters: Don't CREEP.” The previous week Ford campaign manager Bo Callaway had been placed on temporary leave, then left the campaign altogether, after the *Denver Post* and NBC carried a report charging him with using his position as secretary of the army to discuss with U.S. Forest Service representatives the expansion of a Colorado ski resort he partly owned. (Nothing came of the charges, but such was the culture of suspicion that the Ford campaign erred on the side of caution.) The next day brought Evans and Novak's scoop on the “Sonnenfeldt Doctrine.” On April 6, as Wisconsin went to the polls, the president announced a cabinet-level committee investigating the overseas corporate bribery scandal. Three days later, backfilling the damage from the Sonnenfeldt revelations and Zumwalt's quotes from Henry Kissinger, he opened his campaign for the May 1 primary showdown in Texas John Wayne–style, at the Alamo, pledging, “All of our courage, all of our skill in battle will profit us very, very little if we fail to maintain the unsurpassed military strength which this dangerous world demands of us.”

Then he accepted a snack—a tamale—before the cameras, not knowing that before you bit into one you were supposed to strip off the corn-leaf husk. That was the lead story the next day. Poor Jerry Ford.

THE NEXT BIG DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY WAS IN PENNSYLVANIA ON APRIL 27; the Republicans were not contesting it. The Supreme Court's *Buckley* opinion had cut off the flow of more than a million dollars in federal matching funds owed the candidates until Congress passed and the president signed a new campaign finance law. On April 22 all of the candidates except the president filed suit on First Amendment grounds arguing that the cutoff violated the First Amendment rights of citizens who'd checked the box on their tax returns to contribute to the federal election fund. The cutoff had already almost finished Morris Udall—about whom the campaign reporters had penned the ditty “Second Place Mo” after his third second-place finish, in Wisconsin, and who in Pennsylvania cut back his television ad expenditures from $150,000 to $85,000 and chopped his radio commercials altogether. The Gallup poll had Carter and the noncandidate Humphrey tied at 31 percent nationwide among Democrats, with Wallace at 13, Scoop Jackson at 6, and Udall at 5. “Where I can get known, I do well,” Udall told reporters, desperately, shaking hands at a Fisher body plant in Pittsburgh.

Scoop Jackson had high hopes for the Keystone State, where the old-line union locals that favored both Jackson and Humphrey were powerful. He had won the New York primary handily on April 6—though the effect was severely attenuated by the fact that he'd predicted “a landslide,” and that the media interpreted it as an endorsement of the politics of Hubert Humphrey. (Second Place Mo had finished second.) Humphrey, Jackson, Udall, and Carter had shared the stage in New York City at a conference of mayors just before the primary there, and Humphrey had stolen the show. Pennsylvania was shaping up as a battle for the “lunch-bucket” voters: those white ethnic building-trade and factory workers who had proved so susceptible to right-wing populist appeals—like the guy who starred in a Nixon campaign commercial in 1972, sitting high up on a construction girder eating his lunch, listening with grave concern as the voice-over instructed him how George McGovern's economic plans “would make forty-seven percent of the people in the United States eligible for welfare” and stick him with the bill. And the voters that same year who had given George Wallace his overwhelming primary victories in Michigan and Maryland that year over the issue of forced busing.

Jimmy Carter, for his part, changed his commercials. Hearing from pollsters that undecided voters found him vague on the issues, his team had an announcer tack introductions onto the existing spots—things like, “Jimmy Carter on the *issue* of health care,” and “Jimmy Carter on the *issue* of unemployment”—and then a conclusion in which the same voice said, “If you think about this *critical issue* the way Jimmy Carter does, then vote for him.”

Then Carter, tied with a candidate who wasn't even running for president, made his play for the lunch-bucket voters and ended up with the first serious gaffe of his campaign.

It came just before the voting in Wisconsin, and just as a new poll came out that had him ahead of Ford in a head-to-head matchup. He was quoted, deep within a New York *Daily News* story on April 2 concerning government policies to finance construction of low-income housing in middle-class neighborhoods, as saying: “I see nothing wrong with ethnic purity being maintained. I would not force racial integration on a neighborhood by government action. But I would not permit discrimination against a family moving into the neighborhood.” A CBS reporter asked him, “What did you mean by ethnic purity?” He answered, “I have nothing against a community that’s made up of people who are Polish, Czechoslovakians, French-Canadians, or blacks who are trying to maintain the ethnic purity of their neighborhood. This is a natural inclination on the part of people. . . . I don’t think government ought to deliberately break down an ethnically oriented community deliberately by interjecting into it a member of another race. To me, this is contrary to the best interests of the community.” Asked to clarify by reporters in Indiana, which voted on May 4, Carter was convoluted: “I’m not trying to say I want to maintain with any kind of government interference the ethnic purity of neighborhoods. What I say is the government ought not to take as a major purpose the intrusion of alien groups into a neighborhood, simply to establish that intrusion.”

It was the words “ethnic purity” upon which the critics pounced. They threatened to blunt a key component of his appeal. Carter had a favorite story he liked to tell for black audiences—and white ones who were proud of their own racial enlightenment. It involved the time Joe Louis, the “Brown Bomber,” fought Max Schmeling, Hitler’s champion, for the heavyweight title in 1938. The twenty-five black families of Archery, Georgia, asked his father, “Mr. Earl,” if they could listen to the fight, and he agreed—setting the radio on the windowsill, outside which the congregation gathered. Louis prevailed in a single round. The black listeners made not a sound—saving their whoops and hollers until they were over the railroad tracks and almost out of earshot. Jimmy Carter, went the message, understood segregation. He understood the damage it did to communities, to human decency, to men’s souls—segregator and segregated both. As an adult, he had taken serious personal and professional risks to fight to end it. But now, as the Democratic front-runner, a surprise favorite of black voters, he was on the record saying something that sounded like it had come from the mouth of a Klansman.

Seventeen members of the Congressional Black Caucus denounced him, including Andrew Young of Georgia, one of his leading supporters. Scoop Jackson weighed in on ABC’s *Issues and Answers:* “It raises the question of his judgment.” It was an opportunistic move, for Jackson had the machine of the racist mayor Frank Rizzo organizing for him in Philadelphia. Jackson asked, “Do we want a man as president who has to go around apologizing for the things he has said?” (Jackson’s campaign ally Rizzo, on the other hand, had said the previous year during his reelection campaign, “I’m going to make Attila the Hun look like a faggot.”) Lester Maddox, who had beaten Carter for governor in 1966 and was famous for chasing blacks off his property with an ax handle after passage of the Civil Rights Act, said he welcomed “the new segregationist term” and offered to lend Carter an ax handle.

Carter made a half apology at a news conference on April 8 in Philadelphia: “I do want to apologize to all those who have been concerned about the unfortunate use of the term ‘ethnic purity,’” he said. “I would make sure that anyone who wanted to move into a neighborhood would have the right to do it.” He added, though, that he stood behind the general thought. As he put it in a second apology, “I should have said something like ‘ethnic personality,’” but he still opposed the “arbitrary use of federal force” to change the ethnic character of neighborhoods.

Here was the signature Carter straddle. As Udall complained, “That add-on is characteristic of his approach. On an amazing number of issues Jimmy meets himself going through that revolving door.” But the same straddle was made by the president—who responded to a question about Carter’s gaffe by saying that “an ethnic heritage is a great treasure,” and adding, “I don’t think that federal action should be used to destroy that ethnic treasure.” Ford also wondered “whether that remark will have any impact on the support that he has heretofore gotten in the black communities of the various states.” Carter cleverly responded to *that* by elevating himself to the status of Ford’s presumptive opponent: “I am happy to have aroused the interest and the opposition of the President. . . . I guess now he’s joined the ‘Stop Carter’ movement. But what he should know from me is that I am going to stop him in November.”

On the defensive? Not so much. Instead he displayed another signature political skill: turning adversity into advantage. At a press conference in Philadelphia, he held up a newspaper with the headline “STOP-CARTER ALLIANCE IS FORMED.” He replied, “I’m not going to yield anything to the political bosses. . . . I am letting the voters know that I belong to them. . . . I have never predicated my campaign on endorsements.” He then traveled to Detroit (Michigan’s primary was on May 18), speaking next to the city’s black mayor, Coleman Young—who had endorsed him. And then before thousands in Atlanta at a rally with Daddy King, who had endorsed him, too, assuring the audience, “I love him and believe in him.” Meanwhile, the Associated Press story about Carter’s serial apologies appeared in many papers beside another AP piece about how the federal government’s welfare costs increased 21.4 percent in a single year, adding to the rolls 266,000 families, 11.3 million individuals, and running up a $24.8 billion bill all told.

You might be a voter panicked to think that hordes of black welfare recipients might soon crowd you out of a neighborhood whose, um, "ethnic personality" you cherished. Or you might be one who revered Martin Luther King. Either way, if you were a Pennsylvanian, you might well have voted for James Earl Carter. His victory there was called on TV "overwhelming" within three hours after the polls closed. He got twice as many delegates as Scoop.

Two days later, Jackson announced he wouldn't be campaigning in Indiana—it looked like the end of the road. It was also the deadline for entering the New Jersey primary, held on June 8. This was the last chance to enter a primary for the year, and a poll in New Jersey showed the Minnesotan ahead of the Georgian by forty-six points. Humphrey had asked the chairman of the state's Democratic Party to gather signatures to get him on the ballot. At a news conference on April 11 he said, "If I'm a candidate I'll win. Make no mistake about that . . . should my party need me at the convention, I would consider it an honor to serve the party. . . . I'm ready." But on April 29 Humphrey stepped up to the press conference microphones for a statement so eagerly anticipated that the networks cut into the soap operas to broadcast it. It was anticlimactic: "I shall not seek it; I shall not compete for it; I shall not search for it; I shall not scramble for it," he said of the possibility he might actively campaign for the presidency. "One thing I don't need at my stage of life is to be ridiculous." He joked that he hadn't thought about a "brokered convention"—one in which no candidate got a majority on the first ballot, and bosses began horse-trading the delegates they controlled in exchange for favors; the Democrats hadn't had one since 1952—"since eleven A.M."

But he also said, not joking: "I'm around."

GERALD FORD WAS IN HOUSTON SAYING CARTER "HAS NOT DEALT WITH the hard decisions of the Oval Office"—as if Carter were already the nominee. Texas, for the Republicans, was shaping up as slash-and-burn. Ronald Reagan had not dealt with the hard decisions of the Oval Office, either. And Gerald Ford did not intend to let Texans forget it.

For his part, Reagan had to turn up the volume. Bereft of matching funds, he was still practically broke. He had pulled out of Wisconsin two weeks before the April 6 primary, claiming he was preparing for his March 31 televised speech. But he had actually stopped traveling to save money, which banks would no longer loan him—fearing repercussions from the White House, John Sears claimed, though it's just as likely would-be creditors just feared they would never get their money back. Reagan made only one trip in the two weeks before April 6, slaying them at a party fund-raiser in Virginia (he revised a favorite old story about the man who got read a letter informing him he would no longer be getting Social Security payments because he was dead, this time around adding that a sympathetic bureaucrat who learned about the mistake sent him seven hundred dollars for "funeral expenses" to tide him over). And in fact that March 31 broadcast almost hadn't come about at all. First, the networks wouldn't sell him the time. Then, when NBC changed its mind, the campaign didn't have the money—until a conservative banker from Houston came through with an emergency $100,000 loan.

Privation, though, and the president's insults—and receptive foot-stomping Texan audiences—turned out to concentrate Reagan's mind beautifully. Ford hadn't even opened his campaign at the Alamo when Reagan claimed he'd seen a transcript of some obscure testimony from the State Department's negotiator in Panama, Ambassador-at-Large Ellsworth Bunker, to the Panama Canal Subcommittee of the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee, which Reagan said laid out the administration's intention to "give away" the canal. He would say that the Panama Canal Zone was "sovereign U.S. territory, every bit the same as Alaska and all the states that were carved from the Louisiana Purchase."

He would say it, and the Texas foot-stomping would commence; it was something to behold.

Even though it was not true.

The 1904 treaty granted the United States not sovereignty but "rights, power, and authority" there "as if it were the sovereign of the territory," a crucial distinction: if a baby was born to a foreigner in Alaska or Louisiana, that child would be an American citizen, certainly not the case for Panamanians who gave birth in the Zone.

Tell that, though, to a foot-stomping Texan. You might get stomped upon yourself.

It had to be excruciating for Jerry Ford. But running against Ronald Reagan for anything must have been excruciating for those who wished to honor truth. There was that tourist paddle wheeler the *Delta Queen*, ordered by meddlesome Washington bureaucrats to be fireproofed, when it had "never had a fire," though she had actually caught fire shortly before he said this. Or the time, at a 1975 roundtable at the conservative think tank the American Enterprise Institute, when he said that the Food and Drug Administration was killing Americans: "I think something more than 40,000 tuberculars alone have died in this country who conceivably could have been saved by a drug that has been widely used the past few years through Europe." In fact the drug, rifampin, had been on the market since 1971—and the FDA had approved it even before the manufacturer submitted the application. And the number of people who died of tuberculosis was less than 28,000 in the decade when he spoke. As it happened, this contradicted what Reagan said on the radio that summer in a rant against socialist medicine. He quoted Teddy Kennedy as saying that medical costs were increasing while quality was declining. Reagan said, "He's talking about the country in which . . . tuberculosis, typhoid fever, and many other diseases have disappeared in our lifetime."

He had a favorite bowdlerization of a quote from Thomas Jefferson: "The American people won't make a mistake if they're given all the facts." Surely Gerald Ford wished that this were actually so. Didn't Mark Twain once say something about how a lie can travel halfway around the world before the truth has time to lace up its shoes?

In Texas, the lies wore cowboy boots. Reagan would say, "We should end those negotiations and tell them we bought it, we paid for it, we built it, and we intend to keep it," and the stomping would start up anew. The "we built it" part was a new addition, playing to generations of heroic schoolboy tales about beating back the swamps and jungles in the interest of progress, but that wasn't quite accurate, either: Panamanians and other contract laborers were the ones who overwhelmingly wielded the tools. Although at that, Ford was telling a half-truth about Panama, too: that America "will never give up its right to the canal." But the testimony to the Fisheries Committee flushed out by Reagan had Ambassador Bunker admitting that his negotiating directive was to offer to yield the Canal Zone "after a period of time" and the canal itself "over a longer period of time." And on April 16, after Reagan pounded him in Texas for three days straight on the subject, the president admitted that, yes, negotiations could lead to eventual Panamanian control, but only after another "thirty to fifty years." But that failure to write a new treaty could lead to further rioting in Panama and perhaps elsewhere in Latin American—which, of course, only played into Reagan's charge that Ford was letting America be pushed around by tinhorn dictators.

Damned if he did, damned if he didn't.

Late in March the Ford campaign had defied a letter from a Reagan campaign lawyer to the FEC charging that since the secretary of state was "using his high office for the express purpose of a campaign platform to promote the Ford candidacy," Kissinger's travels should be charged against Ford's campaign spending limit. And the campaign staff sent Kissinger to Dallas for a series of speeches to answer Reagan. Kissinger said America and Russia were in a position of "rough equilibrium" on nuclear arms, and that "nothing we could have done would have prevented it," and "nothing we can do now will make it disappear"—not exactly stirring stuff. Then Ford's own new campaign manager, Rogers Morton, predicted, without warning his boss, that Kissinger would soon be fired. The president was forced in an April 13 press conference to affirm that "Secretary Kissinger has been one of the finest, if not the finest, Secretary of State this country has ever had"—not the sort of thing that played well in Texas.

On April 17, Ford's press secretary, Ron Nessen, the first to come to the job from TV instead of print media, did something the White House thought frightfully clever, in order to dispel the president's klutz image: Nessen hosted *Saturday Night Live*. After members of the "Dead String Quartet" opened the show by keeling over, Nessen's monologue nearly had the audience doing the same; after Dan Aykroyd's pitch for the Super Bass-o-Matic '76 (a blender: "Wow," exclaimed Laraine Newman, drinking down a blended beverage, "that's terrific bass!"), Nessen fell flat playing beside Chevy Chase as the president and a stuffed dog depicting the presidential pooch Liberty. After John Belushi played a lieutenant colonel puffing a joint as an inducement to recruiting today's counterculture youth, and a video cameo from the real-life Gerald Ford appropriating Chevy Chase's tagline ("Good evening, I'm Gerald Ford, and you're not"), Nessen sat embarrassed through a Weekend Update gag in which the pronunciation-impaired Miss Emily Litella (Gilda Radner) railed against "all this fuss I've been hearing about the 1976 presidential erection." At one point he was booed. The exercise was a bomb—not least in Texas, where marijuana-scented parodies of America's military honor were not exactly appreciated.

On April 20, Washingtonians who had been waiting for an official endorsement of Ford from John Connally, still Texas's most towering political figure, were shocked when the former treasury secretary, who knew a political dead fish when he saw one, stabbed the President of the United States in the back. He would endorse neither man, and hinted he might launch a third-party run. Reagan took the gloves off. Ford had signed a bill that made moves toward allowing U.S. companies to crack the embargo against the Republic of Vietnam, and opened the door to diplomatic recognition—Reagan's opening to reintroduce the Vietnam MIA card. No matter that a delegation led by the conservative Mississippi Democrat Gillespie "Sonny" Montgomery, chairman of the House Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia, had traveled to Vietnam and concluded that the notion of MIAs still in Vietnam was a myth, manufactured by the Chinese to keep their rival from diplomatic recognition by the United States. Reagan remained adamant. "If there is to be any recognition," he boomed on April 20 in a shopping center in Macon, Georgia, which voted on May 4 along with Indiana, "let it be discussed only after they have kept their pledge to give a full accounting of our men still listed as missing in action." He also charged that Ford's "attorney general is promoting a seven-point measure which is gun control and will take guns away from law-abiding citizens."

The next day's Evans and Novak column spied in Reagan's rhetoric a new electoral strategy: since Texas was an "open" primary state, where citizens could choose to vote in either party's primary, Reagan was pushing hard on the sort of cultural resentments that once drove Democrats to George Wallace. He put on a TV commercial written by Arthur Finkelstein starring a Fort Worth voter named Rollie Millirons, who said, "I've always been a Democrat. As much as I hate to admit it, George Wallace can't be nominated. So for the first time in my life I'm gonna vote in the Republican primary. I'm gonna vote for Ronald Reagan." Flyers featured a drawing of an elephant—"I'm for Reagan!"—and a donkey—"Me too!" Evans and Novak made a sartorial observation from a Reagan rally to suggest that it was working: "The remarkable gathering of over 3,000 lacked the sleek, chic look of Texas Republicans and seemed much more like a typical Wallace rally—women in house dresses, sport-shirted men, lots of American flags. If the virtual collapse of Wallace's candidacy is sending right-wing populist Democrats across party lines to Reagan, President Ford is in deepening trouble here."

More conservative movement money came in: a total of $778,000 from a mailing in North Carolina, $110,000 in "independent expenditures" from the ACU's Conservative Victory Fund, $24,000 from a former high school government teacher for ads that instructed Democrats to "call your local newspaper" to learn how they could register as Republicans to vote for Reagan; so many calls swamped the *Waco News-Tribune* that the paper ran instructions on its front page to ease the strain on its switchboard. And Ronald Reagan was now defining the political playing field. Ford intensified his language against Hanoi: "Under no circumstances do we contemplate recognizing North Vietnam." His press secretary was forced to defend the president against charges that he was manipulating Congress to stall a new campaign finance bill to renew matching funds, in order to "starve out" Reagan. As Pat Buchanan wrote, "The liberal wing of the Republican Party is a spectator now. It lacked the numbers to advance its own candidate, or the will to save its own champion, the Vice President. The civil war in the GOP is between conservatives—militant and moderate."

THE SORTS OF STORIES THAT MADE THE SUSPICIOUS CIRCLES NOD SMUGLY crowded the news. For instance, from San Diego, the story of a mentally retarded Marine private beaten by other recruits for some forty-five minutes on the orders of their drill sergeant as the victim cried, "God, make them stop"—until he was finally silenced by his death. And, from the small town of Grangeville, Idaho, the city council that considered a proposal to outlaw the wearing of handguns within city limits after a posse of armed citizens confronted the county prosecutor demanding his resignation. Thirty of them, armed to the teeth, visited the council chamber as the measure was being debated. One said the Second Amendment right was "just like any other muscle in your body. If you don't exercise it regularly it goes away. I only exercised my inalienable right. I'm glad I did it because I can see that this right is in danger." They then presented a letter announcing, "We will resist with all lawful means your tyrannical act which attempts to abrogate the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. . . . If anyone should be disarmed it should be the government, not us." Retailers testified that the gun-toters were scaring off their customers. To no avail: the ordinance failed.

Time featured the nation's "Porno Plague," an "open, aggressive, $2-billion-a-year, crime-ridden growth enterprise," flourishing now that "most of the traditional barriers to porn are now down," and reported a demonstration of 1,200 marchers, including two hundred schoolchildren, in front of "Show World," the sexual supermarket on New York's Forty-second Street that introduced live sex shows, a forty-four-second peep for only a quarter. And in Boston, the ongoing busing crisis—and the anger of white construction workers over affirmative action—once again turned violent. Early in April, one hundred fifty antibusing youth confronted a black man in a three-piece suit, attorney Theodore Landsmark, executive director of the association of black contractors agitating for more city contracts, with the most convenient weapon they could get their hands on: a large American flag, with which one of them appeared to run Landsmark through as if with a spear. The mayor, stunned, watched the scene from his office up above. The picture of the attack appeared the next day on the front page of the *Boston Globe*.

Landsmark appeared at a press conference with his entire face crisscrossed by white bandages, excoriating city officials, like school committee member Louise Day Hicks, who "incite and encourage" racist violence. In the *Globe* the president of the South Boston High School and Home Association, James M. Kelly, said that the attack was "retaliation" for "black crime." Two Saturdays later, on April 24, liberal religious leaders, the mayor, and senators Brooke and Kennedy led a "Procession Against Violence" of about fifty thousand people through the city—though few blacks and fewer antibusing whites showed up. "Teach us, O God, that the voice of violence speaks not for democracy but for the devil of fascism," a rabbi prayed. The march was followed by bomb threats and stone throwing.

But, simultaneously with all that, came another development that helped define the political playing field. Call it patriotism chic—another edge for Ronald Reagan. It was a journeyman outfielder for the Chicago Cubs who came to the rescue, the afternoon after that Boston violence. Some knucklehead ran onto dead center of the playing field at Dodger Stadium with his eleven-year-old son, set down an American flag, doused it with lighter fluid, and struggled to strike a match. All of a sudden the center fielder dashed into the frame, swooped down and grabbed up the flag, and deposited it safely in the dugout as police arrested the intruders. RICK MONDAY . . . YOU MADE A GREAT PLAY, the scoreboard spelled out when he came to bat in the next half inning.

UPI sent out a feature by its sports editor:

"Rick Monday isn't one of those super-patriots. He's just an ordinary guy. Ordinary in the sense he doesn't get up on a soapbox making speeches but still appreciates all the opportunities this country offers over so many others.

"The action he took when he saw the flag about to be burned may signal the beginning of some kind of turnaround in the general pattern of our behavior.

"Maybe we're getting back to that point where it once was fashionable for everyone to respect not only his country and his flag but also himself, and if it turns out that somebody like Rick Monday had to be the one to show the way then I say hooray for him. . . .

"In that regard, I seem to be noticing an increasing number of people, including some like Muhammad Ali who were critical of this country in the past, suddenly rediscovering many of its advantages. These advantages were here all the time but somehow were overlooked in all the babble and confusion."

The accompanying photograph showed Monday accepting a peck on the cheek from "Miss Illinois Teenager" Mary Lou Valkenberg during Rick Monday Day ceremonies at Wrigley Field. "I'd like to thank the American public, which typifies what the American flag means," he said, the echo booming like in the climactic scene of *Pride of the Yankees*. "God bless America!" More such ceremonies followed. America had a new national hero, who said into one of the microphones stuck in his face, "If you're going to burn the flag, don't do it around me. I've been to too many veterans' hospitals and seen too many broken bodies of guys who tried to protect it."

THE PRESIDENT LANDED IN TEXAS ON TUESDAY, FOUR DAYS BEFORE THE May 4 primary, bearing signs reminding voters who had the power to deliver the pork: PRESIDENT FORD, '76. His secretary of state, however, landed in Africa—hat in hand. Part of his agenda for his unprecedented two-week trip to the continent was to represent the United States at a conclave between First World and Third World nations, the latter still swaggering after the 1973 Arab oil embargo—and the American colossus's humiliation in Vietnam. Kissinger hoped to put a finger in the dike against developing nations' radical schemes to form cartels intended to advantage sellers over buyers of crucial commodities like bauxite. A political cartoon mocked the notion of mighty Henry Kissinger as humble supplicant. He wore safari gear and a pith helmet. He shook the hand of a handsome, dark-skinned potentate in a suit, who greeted him, "Dr. Kissinger, I presume." The political timing was terrible. Texas cowboys didn't care for secretaries of state on safari.

Another goal was to unveil a new diplomatic stance toward the landlocked southern African nation named after the British colonialist Cecil Rhodes—a country ruled by whites who were outnumbered by native blacks by a factor of twenty-three. "Time is running out for Rhodesia's white rulers," Kissinger said as he stepped off his silver-and-blue jet. "The future of Africa must be shaped by Africans." On April 28 he announced as official U.S. policy "unrelenting U.S. opposition" and "massive discouragement" toward anything standing in the way of a peaceful transfer of power to the black majority. Warning that violent civil war was imminent between the white government and black militants who'd been waging a guerrilla war against it since the country ceased being a British colony in 1965, he advised Americans to leave the country for their own safety. He also said the administration would work for repeal of the "Byrd Amendment," a law that directed the State Department to ignore a United Nations embargo against the purchase of Rhodesia's number-one export, chromium—a crucial ingredient in the manufacture of stainless steel.

The next day, back in the United States, as Hubert Humphrey decided not to enter the New Jersey primary and a bomb blast injured